

1-1-2003

Information sources and needs of women farmland owners in Cass County, Iowa

Pernell Roberta Plath
Iowa State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/rtd>

Recommended Citation

Plath, Pernell Roberta, "Information sources and needs of women farmland owners in Cass County, Iowa" (2003). *Retrospective Theses and Dissertations*. 19542.
<https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/rtd/19542>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Iowa State University Capstones, Theses and Dissertations at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Retrospective Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.

Information sources and needs of women farmland owners in Cass County, Iowa

by

Pernell Roberta Plath

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major: Sustainable Agriculture

Program of Study Committee:
Ricardo J. Salvador (Major Professor)
Jill Wagner
Deb Muenchrath

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2003

Graduate College
Iowa State University

This is to certify that the master's thesis of
Pernell Roberta Plath
Has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

Signatures have been redacted for privacy

**For my mother, who taught me tolerance
and inspired my love of learning.**

Table of Contents

Abstract	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: A Brief History of Land Ownership in the United States	4
Chapter 3: Literature Review	11
Chapter 4: Methods and Materials	18
Chapter 5: Results and Discussion	27
Chapter 6: Conclusions	57
Appendix A: Landowner Focus Group Questions	59
Appendix B: Agency Personnel Focus Group Questions	60
Appendix C: Landowner Background Questions	61
Appendix D: Agency Personnel Background Questions	62
References	63
Acknowledgements	67

Abstract

Since European settlement of Iowa, women have owned farmland. Women, either singly or in partnerships, own over fifty percent of the agricultural land in Iowa. Perhaps more significantly, women are now the largest group of agricultural landlords in the U.S. and in Iowa, owning over half of all leased land. As the amount of female owned land increases, the need for appropriate outreach also expands. This thesis is an attempt to better understand the information sources and needs of women farmland owners as part of a pilot project in Cass County, Iowa.

To summarize major literature review findings, women landowners are typically older than male landowners, they tend to rent most of their land to others and are less likely to operate their land themselves or make management decisions. Historic patterns of power and gender relations can leave female landowners with less day-to-day control over their land than their renters.

Research methods included two focus groups and two interviews conducted with women farmland owners. In addition, a focus group was held with professionals from a government agency to compare their understanding of women's needs with research findings from the landowners.

The most striking theme to emerge from the results was the importance of personal relationships with information transfer. Talking with spouses, friends and neighbors seemed to be the most central way in which women acquired information about their land. Personal resources were the most trusted information sources, while strangers and/or impersonal sources were the least trusted. Also, culturally pervasive forms of gender bias continue to shape the environment within which women gain and use information, with both outright and subtle discrimination and self-censorship as obstacles to information flow. Complex government programs, limited time and isolation are

additional barriers. Stage in life and home responsibilities has an impact on the best ways for women to receive information.

Government agency participants did understand the importance of personal relationships for information transfer, that time limitations present an obstacle for women landowners and that generational differences affect how women approach their land ownership. Agency personnel also understood the confusing nature of government programs and that female landlords' relationships with their tenants can be exploitive. Yet, agency respondents explicitly dismissed gender as a factor influencing information exchange and decision-making.

As women take control of ever-greater amounts of farmland, their relationships with the land will have a tremendous impact on the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices.

Introduction

Since the institution of private property in the state, women have been agricultural landowners in Iowa. They have indelibly shaped the landscape through their work and possession of land. Landownership has not always been an easy undertaking, however. Women farmland owners have met with discrimination, both culturally and under the law, that has diminished their control over the resources they own. Yet, women have persevered and succeeded as landowners.

The amount of land owned by women is continually rising. According to a survey by Pieper and Harl (2000) women, either singly or in partnerships, own over fifty percent of the agricultural land in Iowa. Additionally, women are now the largest group of agricultural landlords in Iowa, owning over half of all leased land (Ibid.).

Current literature on women landowners brings several points to light. Women landowners tend to be older and to have historically depended more than men on land rental income. Women are less likely than men to operate their own farms and are more likely to reside in off-farm urban areas (Rogers and Vandeman 1993). Female landowners are also less likely to make farm management decisions, either alone or with tenants (Effland, Rogers and Grim 1993), even when there are direct environmental implications to those decisions (Rogers and Vandeman 1993).¹ In addition, farm landlords appear to have less power than their tenants, with Gilbert and Beckley (1993) proposing a “dominant tenant-subordinate landlord” model.

Aside from the above data, fairly little is known about how these women landowners acquire information to make decisions regarding their land, their relationship to the land they own and their future plans. Some evidence suggests that women differ from their male counterparts in these respects (Wells 2001). Furthermore, women agricultural landowners have informally commented that attending mixed-gender public meetings or approaching male agency representatives with questions can be a source of stress and discomfort (Cass County Women Farmland Owners Advisory Committee 2002). This lack of data and understanding of the gendered dimensions of landownership limits the abilities of both governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations to plan and deliver appropriate outreach. This thesis elucidates the ways in which women participating in a pilot

¹ “Direct environmental impact” in this instance refers to fertilizer and chemical use.

study in Cass County, Iowa gain information about their farmland, the sources of information they trust, which topics they would like to know more about and their preferred methods of receiving information in the future.

Research Questions

The premise of this thesis is that as women continue to make up an ever-increasing share of agricultural landowners, their need for appropriate outreach also increases. Currently, women farmland owners are under-served by agricultural institutions and under-represented in decision-making bodies that shape natural resource policies and priorities (Wells 2002). Without appropriate outreach and representation, landowners will continue to be at-risk for exploitation, loss of income and making unsustainable agricultural decisions. Since women are often less than fully engaged with overall farm operations, they are subject to potential mistreatment in land and livestock business deals. Also, women may not have as much fluency with estate planning, farm program information and sustainable resource management, limiting their full participation in these activities. Yet, little concrete data has been collected about women farmland owners' information sources, their knowledge gaps and the best methods to reach them to bridge those gaps. The research questions that I answer for women in Cass County, Iowa are: What are their sources of information about their land? Do they trust these sources? What topics would they like to know more about? And, finally, what are the best means for information delivery in regards to their land?

Thesis Organization

The body of the thesis begins with a chapter succinctly outlining a history of land ownership in the United States, and then narrowing down to Iowa and then to Cass County. Though the chapter does not focus entirely on female land ownership, the background information is relevant to set the context for a specific treatment of women's tenure. In the second chapter, Literature Review, I examine the available literature on women's land ownership, tenant-landlord relationships and women's choices for their land. This chapter also briefly considers theoretical issues relevant to the results. The Methodology chapter explains the research methods I used to conduct my study. For depth and texture, I used qualitative methods – focus groups and personal interviews. The Results and Discussion chapter follows with highlights of the major findings and a deeper analysis of results. The closing chapter will contain the overall conclusions from the research, as well as implications for sustainable agriculture in Iowa. This chapter also addresses the limitations of my research findings and offers recommendations for future research.

A Brief History of Land Ownership in the United States

In the 1830s European settlers began moving in earnest into the territory that is now the state of Iowa. Since that time, both single and married women have owned land, though their ownership and contributions to the development of Iowa have often been ignored. Writing on land ownership of that time period, W.G. Murray stated, “How this Iowa was settled by hardy pioneers and how these same pioneers, their *sons*, and their *grandsons* succeeded and failed in the struggle for ownership of the state’s fertile acres is recorded...” [emphasis added] (Ross 1946). In this account, and most other descriptions of historical patterns of land tenure, women are absent. As women now own a substantial portion of farmland across the country, their presence can no longer be as readily dismissed. Attention is mounting with respect to the ways in which women approach landownership, as well as their specific needs as female landowners. An historical examination of land ownership in the United States provides context for understanding patterns of land tenure that have shaped women’s landownership today.

The history of land holding in the United States is interwoven with a complex web of gender, class and racial divisions that have frequently intersected with one another. From the beginning of European settlement, these issues have dictated who owns how much of what land. Popular sentiment claims that an equal opportunity system has been at work, with farmland being controlled primarily by family farmers. Contrary to this view, contemporary assessments emphasize that the realities of land distribution have been far from this ideal (Zinn 1999, Opie 1976). They propose that this process has consistently amassed land into the hands of wealthy white men, excluding native populations, women, the poor and minorities. This chapter will briefly articulate a history of landownership in the United States as a whole, with sensitivity to some of the gender and class dimensions of land apportionment.² The discussion focuses on Iowa, specifically Cass County, Iowa.

The first settlers brought with them land laws and policies from England. Originally, the English monarch granted a land monopoly to the Virginia Company of London in 1606 (Schlebecker 1975:3); the company then doled out farm plots to its previously indentured servants. The system worked fairly well initially, as the original groups of servants did indeed become landowners in their own right (Zinn 1999). Nevertheless, increasing numbers of freemen and independent settlers put pressure

² A fair treatment of the racial dimensions of landownership is beyond the scope of this chapter.

on the arrangement and later groups of immigrants did not fare so well. “[B]y the second half of the century more than half the servants, even after ten years of freedom, remained landless” (Zinn 1999:47).

To reduce population pressures and civil unrest, the colonial government overhauled the land distribution scheme of Virginia in 1616. The Crown began the headright system of giving 50-acre parcels of land to each person who paid their own expenses for migration to the New World (Schlebecker 1975). As other colonies sprang up around the East coast, a variety of other policies were employed to disperse territory in newly occupied lands.

The trend toward private property ownership was a common element among the disparate land policies of the various colonies. As ever-increasing amounts of public land were distributed to private individuals, land transfers not directly involving the government became more common. “Farmers had slowly forced on each colonial government a policy which facilitated individual acquisition of land. First companies, then proprietors, relinquished land to those who farmed it” (Schlebecker 1975:14). For various reasons, governments did indeed make land available to owner-operators. Yet, a substantial portion of land continued to be held by large land barons. In 1678 a document submitted to the Massachusetts General Court boasted that, “You may be pleased to know that the very principle and best of the land; the best for soile; the best for situation; as laying in ye center and middle of the town; and as to quantity, nere half, belongs unto eight or nine proprietors...” (Zinn 1999). Concentration of ownership into the hands of a few fated the rest of the population to either life in the city, tenant farming or squatting on land to which they had no rights. Consequently, revolts against the large landholders were fairly common.

Despite the huge landholdings, individual families - whether squatters, tenants or landowners - were still frequently responsible for transforming uncultivated land into a farm and home, thus, women’s contributions were extremely important. In spite of that significance, treatment of women in colonial America³ was dichotomous. Men outnumbered women in the new colonies, with this scarcity highlighting women’s necessary participation in the farm enterprise. “A farmer without a wife was, needless to say, severely handicapped” (Smith 1970:38). Carving out a life in the “wilderness” of their new world required an enormous amount of effort and cooperation on the part of all involved.

³ Henceforth, “America” shall refer to the United States of America and “American” to a resident of the United States.

Women performed a wide variety of practical domestic tasks, but were also indispensable as peacemakers and spiritual glue. Also, since colonial society did not clearly define appropriate roles for women, they did have some flexibility in their pursuits, entering into a fair number of occupations (Smith 1970:56). Many women had other options besides marriage and family, thus providing them with a bit of power within society. Yet, as second-class citizens, both culturally and legally, women bore the brunt of the challenges of life in their untried world, from greater hunger and physical ailments to isolation and abuse. Moreover, newly arrived immigrant women were frequently sold to male settlers as wives, or into indentured servitude (Chawla 1997). These humiliating sales most likely negatively affected women's standing within society.

Throughout the 1700s, white men and women continually moved west, encroaching upon Native American lands and generating conflicts. Mounting tensions with the indigenous population prompted colonial government attempts to enforce a uniform land policy in 1763. The Royal Land Proclamation ordered a halt to westward expansion into Native territories, which severely angered the colonists and played a role in instigating the American Revolution. Perceptions of inalienable private property rights pervaded elite society of colonial America. Fueled by John Locke's views of "natural rights," colonists fiercely defended their land claims. Indeed, Thomas Jefferson proclaimed that "personal property, in absolute dominion, disencumbered with any superior" (Opie 1987:21) was essential for American success. "It is difficult to think of the political climate of early American history without ownership of land as the primary ingredient to guarantee the individual's autonomy" (Opie 1987:21).

As the Revolutionary war commenced, the leaders promised parcels of land to conscripts in exchange for fighting the British. The strategy was successful in that nearly all free white men at one time or another served in the military (Zinn 1999). However, the war did not appreciably change the situations of lower-class people. Constitutions drawn up in the new states largely maintained the status quo while continuing to require land ownership as a prerequisite to voting. Lands obtained from the British were not necessarily made available to those most in need. "[Any] land confiscated from fleeing loyalists...was distributed in such a way as to give a double opportunity to the Revolutionary leaders: to enrich themselves and their friends, and to parcel out some land to small farmers to create a broad base of support for the new government" (Zinn 1999:84).

Along with political changes in the newly founded United States, social and economic changes affecting women were emerging. As the eastern U.S. became increasingly urban and clearer class distinctions surfaced, appropriate roles for women narrowed. Women were expected to emulate European bourgeoisie preoccupations with fashion and hostessing (Smith 1970:57). “While most urban women capitulated to their diminished role, an older and more radical tradition prevailed in rural towns” (Smith 1970:58). Several commentators of the day found both men and women who were “great Sticklers of Equality” in rural communities (Smith 1970:59). As urban trends typically find their way to the countryside (Warren 1997), restricted expectations eventually crept into rural consciousness – squeezing rural women into an urban mold. Engaging in business transactions with one’s personal or family resources became ever more “unladylike” (Smith 1970). This reduction of women’s options further limited their status in society as a whole and diminished their power within the family.

After the colonies successfully revolted against English rule, the focus of the new country’s land policies moved toward disposal of public lands into private hands. The first legislation concerning land enacted by the newly independent country was the 1785 Land Ordinance that explicitly called for such action. Furthermore, the Philadelphia Constitutional Convention, which outlined the central tenets by which the United States would be governed, reinforced this movement (Opie 1987). Land enfranchisement for the populace was never a stated goal for the leadership of the Revolution. Land reform was threatening to the founders of the United States, believing that, “If the right to hold land was watered down, the core of the new American society would be lost” (Opie 1987:23). Thus, the only mention of land in the Constitution is in Article 4, Section 3, second paragraph: “The Congress shall have the power to dispose of and make all needful rules and regulations respecting the territory and other property belonging to the United States” (Opie 1987:25).

This brief statement about congressional powers established national public lands policy. It began the process of decentralization of landownership, with benefits and limitations that would shape the American character. It continued the government’s plan for the intentional privatization of the public lands, which would make American society distinctively individualistic. Not least, laissez-faire free enterprise received a shot in the arm as land opportunities became entrepreneurial opportunities for both low-cost development and highly profitable speculation. The Constitution thus provided an early indirect subsidy for nationwide capital enterprise (Opie 1987:25).

To further the government’s goal of land disposal Congress enacted a number of important pieces of legislation. The foremost bits of legislation for Iowa’s history were the Military Land Acts passed

between 1776 and 1855 (Schlebecker 1975:63). These acts provided government scrip that could be used to purchase public lands. The scrip could be transferred, and Iowa farmers took great advantage of this provision. By the time homesteading began in earnest in Iowa, “[o]ver 14 million of Iowa’s 36 million acres went to settlers through military scrip and warrants” (Ibid.). A number of other Acts were passed over the years that opened up land for settlement, but none were as significant as the Military Land Acts.

During most of U.S. history, women, especially married women, were restricted from direct land ownership. Laws stated that when women married, their property became the sole possession of the husband. Expressing official opinion of the day, in the 1800s Justice Blackstone assessed that, “The very being or legal existence of the wife is suspended during marriage, or, at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband” (Bres 1918:15). Legal and cultural views such as this one prompted a number of women, including Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, to organize the first conference dealing explicitly with justice for women in 1840 (Zinn 1999, Smith 1970). The Women’s Rights Convention delegates drew up a document called the Declaration of Principles, which stated, “The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward women, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world...” (Zinn 1999). Their list of grievances included among them restrictions on property ownership. “Thus were women beginning to resist, in the 1830s and 1840s and 1850s, the attempt to keep them in their ‘woman’s sphere’” (Zinn 1999:124).

Most of these movements began in and were centered on the Eastern U.S. Though Western pioneer women were far from viewed as equal to their male counterparts, these women did experience a different daily reality than those in the East. Just as the early colonists relied heavily upon women’s labor and support to endure the hardships of settlement, so too did the pioneers. According to Smith (1970:224), “When Eastern ladies were fainting at a coarse word or vulgar sight their Western sisters...ran cattle, made homes and raised children in the wilderness. It was in the West, in consequence, that women had the greatest status.” Unsurprisingly then, the first state to grant women the right to own property was Oregon in 1850 (History Channel Online). Western Territories were also progressive with respect to women’s land ownership.

Even before Iowa became a state, the rights of married women to own property were protected. In the Territorial Laws of 1846, Chapter 5, Section 1 states, “Any married woman may become seized or

possessed of any real estate by descent, bequest, demise, gift, purchase, or distribution, in her own name and as of her own property..." The first Code of Iowa reinforced these guarantees. In Chapter 84, Section 1447, the Code indicates that "The personal property of the wife does not vest at once in the husband..." No legal restrictions were placed on landownership by single women.

One significant way that women became landowners in Iowa was through the Homesteading Act of 1862. This act was the first critical legislation to open federal lands to women by clearly utilizing the words "he or she" in the law (Jensen 1991:6). Though married women were not permitted to claim land independently, single women and widows could. They were then allowed to retain, sell or transfer the land if they married after staking their claim.

Settlement continued across Iowa throughout the 19th century. By 1840 the first Europeans made their way across the state to what has become Cass County. Explicit mention of women as landowners is made in the early historical accounts of Cass County. These references point to women who were accompanying their spouses in their homesteading enterprises and becoming sole proprietors when their husbands perished. I found no mention of single or widowed women who staked claims to federal lands on their own. Prior to any permanent settlement, Mormons passed through Cass County on their way to Utah and established a temporary community in 1846 (History of Cass County, Iowa 1884:243). The first permanent settlement was established by the Campbell family in Section 7 of Atlantic Township in 1850 (Ibid.). During the early years of settlement in the County, the federal government distributed most of the land through the claims system. Many speculators entered the county, buying up the best claims and then re-selling them to actual settlers. Sales took place through auction in Des Moines; approximately one township per day was sold at \$1.25 maximum per acre (Ibid.).

Since the first days of Cass County, the percentage of female owned land has substantially increased. Approximately 690 women are now either joint or sole owners of farmland in the county (Wells 2002). One significant demographic trend contributing to the increase in female-owned acres is the aging of farm owners and operators. As women generally outlive men and marry younger, widows are taking over sole ownership of land previously held jointly. Moreover, as families give up farming as an occupation, and often move to cities, they may continue to hold the land. Women are also inheriting family land on which they had never before resided. Until recently one substantial barrier to women's land inheritance was federal tax law discrimination (Jensen 1991, Horwitz 1980). Jensen

(1991:1) points out that, “if the husband was the first to die, the entire value of the estate belonged to him and was subject to federal estate tax; but if the wife died first, the husband had to pay no federal tax. The wife had to prove her contribution to the farm through cancelled checks or mortgage checks.” The law was changed in 1982 to allow either spouse to inherit the property of the other without paying federal gift taxes and clearing the way for more women to retain the land they had owned with their husbands.

Literature Review

Though women farmland owners are increasingly recognized as an important group whose knowledge and decision-making has altered the agricultural landscape in the United States, information on the subject is still relatively sparse. Effland, Rogers and Grim (1993) identify several reasons for this neglect. First, they cite the omnipresent U.S. conception of “land to the tiller” (Effland, et al. 1993:236), equating land ownership and operation, ignoring distinctions between the two. “Second, women’s interests in farmland have been subsumed by men’s” (Ibid.). Thus, in cases where men and women owned land jointly, quite often the land was classified in census records as male owned. Finally, women have frequently not held full ownership rights to their land, instead having access to the land through life estates.⁴

Despite these challenges, a body of literature is emerging. The previous chapter reviewed writing on the history of women’s landownership in the United States. This chapter shall expand upon that discussion with a presentation of current trends in land ownership more generally, and women’s land ownership in particular, including recent demographic shifts, gendered elements of decision-making about land and sustainable resource management and landlord-tenant relations. The chapter concludes by briefly framing some of the theoretical issues related to land ownership.

The most recent numbers describing agricultural land in the U.S. come from the 1997 Census of Agriculture and the 1988 follow-up Agricultural Economics and Land Ownership Survey (AELOS). This research reveals that there are 2.95 million private farmland owners in the U.S. Eighty-seven percent of these owners are either individuals or families. In Iowa, 88 percent of farmland is owned by individuals or families (Pieper and Harl 2000). Of those private owners, 67 percent are male, 21 percent are female and 12 percent are joint owners (Effland, et al. 1993). Overall, the number of farmland owners is decreasing (Wunderlich 1991), while total agricultural acreage has increased slightly since 1900, and the average ownership parcel has almost doubled (Ibid.).

Since the 1950s, the number of owners who are not farm operators has also doubled. AELOS found that, nationally, over 40 percent of private farmland is owned by nonoperators. In Iowa in 1982, 55 percent of farmland was owner-operated. By 1997 that number dropped to 39 percent (Pieper and

⁴ “Under a life estate, the owner acquires the right to use the land during his or her lifetime, *not* the right to mortgage the land, convey the land to another person by sale or gift, or devise it by will” (Effland, et al. 1993:239).

Harl 2000). Nonoperators are predominately older women with smaller holdings than owner-operators. Generally, these owners lease out this land to others. "Of the noncorporate lessors, 31 percent are men, 40 percent are women and 29 percent are joint owners, most of which are husband/wife teams" (Wunderlich 1991:6). Women landowners lease out 75 percent of their owned acres, whereas men rent out 18 percent of theirs (Effland, et al. 1993). "In 1988, two-thirds of women landowners were over 60 years old, and 43 percent were over 70, compared to 41 percent of male landowners over age 60 and 18 percent who are 70 or older (Effland, et al. 1993, Rogers 1991). Also, more women landowners reside off-farm than men landowners (Social Sciences Institute 1998). Operator owners hold an average of 299 acres, whereas nonoperator owners possess approximately 261 acres. Wunderlich (1991:6) writes that, "the general trend toward larger farms and larger holdings means that older holdings, formed earlier, will tend to be smaller." Moreover, retirees have typically ceased to accumulate land.

Nonoperators are more likely to purchase land from relatives and inherit their land than are owner operators (Rogers and Wunderlich 1993). "Two-thirds of farm operators acquired at least some of their farmland by purchase from a nonrelative; less than half of nonoperators acquired any of their farmland by purchase from a nonrelative" (Rogers and Wunderlich 1993:2). Forty-six percent of women acquired their land through inheritance or gifts, in comparison to 19 percent for men (Social Sciences Institute 1998, Rogers and Wunderlich 1993). Joint owners received 34 percent of their land in this manner (Rogers and Wunderlich 1993:8). Research also indicates that women's land ownership patterns vary by region, in the U.S., with women owning larger percentages in the South and Midwest (Effland, et al. 1993:245, Geisler, Water, and Eadie 1985).

A substantial portion of the land that women own is leased to others. Thus, information on their roles as landlords and their relationships with tenants is significant for a full understanding of female farmland ownership. The AELOS study entitled "Leasing Farmland in the United States" found that in the late 1980s, 45 percent of all agricultural land was leased and 41 percent of all farmers operated at least some leased land (Rogers 1991). The numbers are even higher for Iowa, with 61 percent of land being farmed as leased land (Pieper and Harl 2000). Over 90 percent of leased land is owned by nonoperator landlords. In Iowa, when gender is cross-tabulated with lease methods, women own 51 percent of leased land and male landowners hold 48 percent (Pieper and Harl 2000). Nationally, average acres held are roughly equal for women and men landlords (226 and 225, respectively), and they lease out approximately equal proportions (Rogers 1991).

Determining land leasing arrangements of women landowners is difficult because AELOS does not break this information down by gender, but does provide information based on age and owner operators vs. nonoperator owners. Considering the demographics of women farmland owners (older, nonoperators), the following statistics provide a conflicting picture of women landowners' leasing arrangements. Nonoperator owners primarily rely on cash-rent leases, with 66 percent of their land leased in this fashion (Rogers 1991). Owner operators rely on cash rent leases for 32 percent of their acreage. Yet, older landowners (70+) are more likely to rely on share leases, with 35 percent of leases being under this arrangement (and only 21 percent for those in the 25 to 34 age category). Moreover, owners with very small holdings (1 to 9 acres) lease 75 percent of their land under cash-rent arrangements, while those with 180 to 499 acres use this option for 56 percent of their land (Rogers 1991).

Historically, women farmland owners have relied more heavily than men on income generated from leasing their land. However, the 1988 AELOS concluded that female landlords are now only slightly more dependent than men on agriculture-related income (Effland, et al. 1993). Even so, the average value of land and buildings owned by women is considerably less than that held by men or joint owners. Women's land and buildings are valued at an average of \$140,000, while men's are valued at \$154,000 and joint owners at \$230,000 (Rogers 1991).

Several factors, not specifically related to gender, appear to effect landlord decision-making on rented land. Rogers (1991) found that whether or not the landowners are operators themselves, the landlord's distance from their leased land and their number of tenants were all significant factors related to the extent to which landowners make decisions about their rented land. "Studies suggest that landlord participation in the management of the land they rent to others has declined in recent years. Nonoperator landlords, now almost 90 percent of all landlords, are more likely to leave management decisions to their tenants" (Rogers 1991:12). In Iowa, Pieper and Harl (2000) found that material landlord participation takes place on less than eight percent of leased farmland. Nevertheless, landlords who also operate farms are more likely to make management decisions either alone or with the tenant than are nonoperating landlords. Landlords who live over 150 miles from their land are less likely to participate in decision-making (Rogers 1991). Finally, landlords with three or more tenants are less involved with decisions than those landlords with one or two tenants.

Though information on the number of tenants women landlords retain is unavailable, in an article exploring an ethnically German farm community in Illinois, Salamon (1979:115) found that women landlords “seemed to prefer several tenants not only because it helps more people, but also because it makes them an important member of several families, and thus demonstrates an awareness of the role of land rental in their social integration.”

Other literature on women’s farmland decision-making finds that women are less likely to make management decisions about their land, either alone or with their tenants (Chiappe and Flora 1998, Effland, et al. 1993, Rogers and Vandeman 1993, Rogers 1991). A 1973 study by Sawyer suggests that women with farm work experience may be more likely to be active decision-makers. Sawyer (1973) studied factors predicting a farm wife’s involvement in decision-making about jointly-owned land and found that “the wife’s farm decision-making role is related to her farm work role and to socioeconomic characteristics such as income and farm size” (Sawyer 1973:412). Joint decision-making occurred most commonly with major decisions, such as buying land and borrowing money.

Since decision-making patterns appear to evolve as husbands and wives participate according to their interests and abilities, it follows that wives who become knowledgeable about farm matters will likely increase their chances of making useful contribution to farm decision-making. Such knowledge might accumulate as the wife’s perception of information sources is influenced by her involvement in the business operation of the farm, or as responsibility in decision-making is accompanied by responsibility for gathering information about the content of the decisions. Since psychological involvement increases as information seeking behavior becomes purposive, active information seekers would seem to imply a degree of personal commitment which might carry over into decision-making situations where the information is relevant (Sawyer 1973:417-418).

Generalizing from this study and AELOS data, women who have been actively involved with farm work may be more active decision-makers if and when they become sole landowners.

Gender also appears to be related to decision-making on conservation issues, yet the interplay of gender with other factors, such as age, income and power inequities, is not entirely straightforward. An ever-expanding body of both philosophical and research-based literature suggests that women often have stronger concerns about environmental issues than men (Boddy Media 2001, Chiappe and Flora 1998, Hartman Group 1997, Hartman Group 1996, Plumwood 1994, Cihangir 1994, Shiva 1994, Warren, 1994). “Women’s responsibilities in the domestic sphere give them a different vantage on sustainability” (Chiappe and Flora 1998). Nevertheless, historic and cultural dynamics may place women at a disadvantage when it comes to operationalizing their environmental attitudes. Rogers and

Vandeman (1993) looked at AELOS data specifically for the effects of gender on environmental decision-making on rented land. They found that female landlords as a whole are *less* likely than men to participate in farm management decisions with direct environmental consequences (Rogers and Vandeman 1993:566). However, when age was factored in, they found that younger female landowners, both farmers and nonfarmers, are *more* likely to make decisions about chemicals and fertilizers than are older male nonfarmers (Ibid.). The authors postulate that a potential reason for women's lack of decision-making is that, "the same factors which determined women's participation on the farm in previous years now determine their role as landlords. This result is consistent with the socially-established division of labor on the farm that limits women's role in management" (Rogers and Vandeman 1993:567). Chiappe and Flora (1993:373) agree, stating, "[w]omen's limited access and control over resources – financial, manufactured, human, social and environmental – often limits their ability to put their values into practice."

In response to concerns that a cultural devaluation of the feminine may be limiting more sustainable choices, Peter, Bell, Jamagin and Bauer (2000) suggest that altering views of masculinity (and conversely, femininity) may bring about greater progress toward environmental sustainability in agriculture. The authors' term "monologic" masculinity is characterized by rigidity and polarized gender expectations, whereas "dialogic" masculinity is characterized by openness, less need for control over nature and less conventional notions of what constitutes "success" (Peter, et al. 2000:215). They argue that conventional agriculture is dominated by monologic masculinity, and that dialogic masculinity "opens up the conversation" between men and women that will allow for alternative agricultural paradigms to flourish (Peter, et al. 2000:232).

When considering landlord/tenant relationships and women's decision-making about their land, power relationships cannot be ignored. Bell, Carolan, Mayerfeld and Exner (2001:3) found that "many female landlords described inequitable power relations between themselves and male tenants. Namely, they expressed feelings of exclusion, alienation, a lack of sufficient technical knowledge (with few places to go [to] attain such knowledge)..." In addition, women reported that they have significant cross-gender communication barriers, much of which centers around assumptions that "farming is man's work" (Bell, et al. 2001).

Marxist theories offer some of the most comprehensive analyses on power relations between land (capital) owners and operators. Marx perceived capital owners as more powerful than those who

operate capital. Yet, with women's farmland ownership, this analysis is open to question. According to Marx, use rights – or the social relations of control – may be divided into real ownership and possession (Gilbert and Beckley 1993). Real ownership refers to:

investment, accumulation, and resource allocation decisions, while the second refers to day-to-day management of physical property and the labor process. Tenure, at least for agriculture, captures these legal and sociological concepts. Tenure, then, describes the social division of property rights in land, particularly ownership claims to income and decision-making control over the land...It is...widely agreed that organizational decisions or "economic ownership" are more basic or determinant than operational management or possession. The former precede, and place limits on the latter. These prior decisions of investment and allocation have been made before the means of production can be set in motion. In this way, they constrain the subsequent operational management of land and labor. There is some disagreement, however, over the social division of property rights when land is rented (Ibid.).

Gilbert and Beckley (1993) have suggested a "dominant tenant-subordinate landlord" model based on their work in Wisconsin. They found that generally either landlord and tenant made decisions together, or that both agreed that the tenant had more control over the land.

Salamon and Kiem (1979) also considered women's power in relation to land ownership. In their rural Illinois study, they found that though land ownership did confer some degree of influence for women, women relinquish much of their power to men, who are the operators of their land. "[I]t may be said that...women have a *potential* source of power in that they own land, but that they generally allow men to exercise control" (Salamon and Kiem 1979; 116).

Further, Shortall (1999) reviews theoretical concepts of land ownership and power. She merges Marxist and feminist theory since, "the source of power is ownership of the means of production, and the owners are men" (Shortall 1999:11). Both theories focus on inequities – either between classes or sexes. Yet, they identify different sources of the inequalities. Marxist views state that inequality stems from economic distinctions, while feminist theories identify sex as the determinant. Shortall proposes that neither Marxism nor feminism alone can adequately explain power relations in land ownership. Bringing in theory from Weber, Mann, Mills, Gaventa, Gramsci and others, Shortall (1999:26) summarizes her analysis as:

Firstly, power means having access to resources which enables someone to control his or her environment. Secondly, power is pursued by organizations and has a distributive and collective dimension. Thirdly, power arrangements are legitimated and they are changed by challenges to their legitimacy. Fourthly, the state upholds men's customary access to land. In any given point in time, power is found in a

balance which appears to be consensual. Yet...examining the third face of power allows us to investigate what lies below the concealing draperies of alleged consent.

Shortall's main focus is an investigation into fundamentally sexist assumptions prevalent in family farming. Though her theoretical framing is very useful for understanding power dynamics within agriculture, her analysis does not delve into the unique situation of female landowners in the U.S.

To summarize major literature review findings, women own a considerable amount of farmland both in the U.S. and in Iowa. Women landowners are typically older than male landowners, they tend to rent most of their land to others, and are less likely to operate their land themselves or make management decisions. Historic patterns of power and gender relations can leave female landowners with less day-to-day control over their land than their male renters.

Methods and Materials

Overview

As stated previously, this study sought to understand women farmland owners' information sources, their knowledge gaps and the best methods to reach them to bridge those gaps. Specifically, this study examined women farmland owners in Cass County, Iowa. For depth of understanding, qualitative research methods were employed. Focus groups and personal interviews were conducted with thirteen women landowners and five government agency employees.

Biases

With any research project, disclosure of biases, both to oneself and to others, helps to ensure that those predispositions will not improperly affect results.

Since everyone who is engaged in research is influenced by a wide range of social factors (such as their sex, gender, age, social background and so on) these need to be acknowledged to avoid concealing our biases. This approach holds that such revelations render our research more honest as, even though researchers will try to correct for any bias in setting up and conducting their research, it is impossible to eliminate it entirely (Buckingham-Hatfield 2000).

Thus stated, some of my biases that should be taken into account are that I am a feminist; I chose this research project partially because of my concern that women's voices are frequently not heard in our culture and that as a result they suffer personally and economically. Despite these partialities, I do not believe that women's situations can be furthered without accurate and appropriate research. As such, I am dedicated to interpreting this research data with as little predisposition as possible.

Advisory Committee

This study was designed to be participatory, thus a 25 member local advisory committee was formed in 2001 with the idea that they would guide both the focus and the logistics of the research. This committee consisted primarily of a core group of thirteen women who own farmland in Cass County, Iowa. Other members of the committee included seven employees of agencies that work with landowners, including ISU Extension, the Department of Natural Resources, the Farm Service Agency and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Other members of the advisory committee were two representatives from the Women, Food and Agriculture Network, an intern with the Life in Iowa program, and two graduate students (including the author) from Iowa State University (departments of Agronomy and Sociology). Advisory committee members insisted early on that the

study focus on women and not include men landowners at this time. Furthermore, the advisory committee reviewed focus group questions and suggested persons who might be willing to participate in groups.

Study Participants

The main participants in the study were women who owned farmland in Cass County, Iowa. At the time of the study, approximately 690 women owned farmland in Cass County. Of those 690, eleven women agreed to participate in two separate focus groups. In addition, two personal interviews were conducted with women farmland owners. Focus group participants and interviewees were separated by marital status, with the assumption that marital status plays an important role in women's information sources and needs (with husbands, when present, acting as both filters and facilitators of information).

As such, one focus group was held with widowed women (WW) and one with currently married women (MW). It is significant to note that, despite being unplanned, nearly all the women in these two groups either knew each other, or knew of each other.⁵ I had originally intended to conduct focus groups with single and divorced women; however, I could not recruit enough women with these demographics to justify focus groups. Thus, one interview was conducted with a divorced woman. The other interview was conducted with a married woman. This interview was actually intended to be a focus group, but no other participants attended that evening. The one single woman I found and had wanted to interview was very confused and disturbed by the Human Subjects Review forms, and also concerned that her disclosures could cause problems with her tenants. Since she was obviously uncomfortable, despite her reluctant agreement, I chose not to pursue the interview.

An additional focus group was held with personnel from a local government office that works with landowners. Personnel from 5 different agencies were invited to attend. Unfortunately, however, staff from only one agency actually attended the group. I asked the participants to fill out forms with a number of background questions (Appendix D), including the name of their agency, their position's title, any relevant previous positions and number of years on the job. Since most of these questions would reveal the participating agency and potentially the individuals in attendance, I will report few of their characteristics. This focus group consisted of four men and one woman. One of the

⁵ In one case, two women's children had dated, though the women had never met until the group.

participants was the director of that office. These participants have been working with the agency for 3.5, 5, 7, 8 and 20 years.

I asked each woman landowner participant to fill out an anonymous form (Appendix C) with information on present occupation, employment status, marital status, year of birth, number of years of education and whether or not she lived on a farm now, grew up on a farm and considered herself a farmer. I asked these questions in order to gain baseline data about the participants. Tables of participant demographics are at the end of this chapter, with pseudonyms added for the interviewees.

Four women attended the WW focus group. For this group, their occupations were listed as “personnel specialist,” “farmer” and “retired.” One woman left this question blank. Three participants indicated that their employment status was “retired,” while another was “unemployed.” All the women were widowed, currently lived on their farmland, and all considered themselves farmers. Three grew up on a farm, and one left the question blank. Years of birth were 1924, 1934, 1937 and 1944. Two women had 12 years of education, two had 16 years of education.

Seven women attended the MW focus group. Their occupations were listed as “farm wife – customer service manager,” “realtor,” “administrative assistant,” “volunteer,” “homemaker,” “USDA employee and farm housewife” and “retired farm assistant – part time farm business association analyst.” Three were employed full-time. One was retired, and three considered themselves homemakers. The retired woman also listed under the “other” category, “partnership with husband operating grain elevator.” All the women now live on farms. Five grew up on farms, two did not, but one of the two indicated that her family owned farmland. Four women answered “yes” that they considered themselves farmers. However, one woman wrote a question mark next to her answer “yes.” Three did not consider themselves farmers, but one of them wrote “part-time” next to her “no” answer. All the women are currently married. Their years of birth are 1936, 1937, 1938, 1941, 1945, 1955 and 1956. Three had twelve years of education, two had 13 years, one had fifteen and another sixteen.

For the married woman who was interviewed alone, her occupation was listed as “working in school food service and assisting at a nursing home.” She is employed full-time, currently lives on a farm and also grew up on a farm, but does not consider herself a farmer, has thirteen years of education and was born in the mid 1950s.

The divorced woman considered her occupational background to be farming, though now she's working in quality assurance. She is semi-retired, did not grow up on a farm and does not now live on a farm, but did for many years. She does consider herself a farmer. She was born in the late 1930s and has 12 years of education.

The Focus Groups

As mentioned previously, Advisory Committee members provided the names of both women landowners and agency professionals who would possibly be willing to participate in the focus groups. I then used the snowball method of making initial contacts with the suggested persons, and asking them to suggest other potential contacts.

I made the opening contact with everyone via either telephone or e-mail. For those who indicated an interest in attending a focus group, I then followed-up with a reminder telephone call and postcard.

I conducted three focus groups over the course of four months. All groups were held in Atlantic, Iowa (in Cass County), in the conference room of the USDA offices. I designed and determined the focus group questions as a complement to a separate mail survey conducted by other members of the Advisory Committee.⁶ Focus group questions were also approved by the Advisory Committee. For the landowner focus groups, I asked ten open-ended questions to allow maximum flexibility with answers. The focus group with government agency personnel consisted of six open-ended questions. Throughout the sessions, however, I asked further questions for clarification, or to follow other leads brought up during the group. Moreover, the sessions were flexible, so other focus group participants asked questions of each other, as well.

I started out each session with a discussion of the basic function of the focus group and a little background information about myself. Questions were then written on a white board, one at a time, and participants were asked to go around the circle answering them. Though we stuck with the basic circular format of answering, others chimed in as appropriate, and the conversation wandered before coming back to the next participant. Sessions were recorded using both a conventional tape-recorder and a digital tape-recorder. I did not take notes during the focus groups, but did take notes on general impressions afterward. For two of the three focus groups (widowed and married women groups),

⁶ Results of this survey, "Survey of Women Farmland Owners in Cass County, Iowa" can be obtained by contacting Dr. Betty Wells, Professor of Sociology, Iowa State University.

another note-taker attended and provided detailed notes on both conversation and non-verbal (such as body language, voice qualities, etc.) factors. Sessions lasted from one hour to two and a half hours, with a break during the middle of the session.

The Interviews

The interview with the married woman was held at a café in Atlantic, Iowa. The café was closed; so we had ample privacy. The same questions were asked during the interview that were used for the focus groups. The interview was also recorded using the digital recorder and conventional tape-recorder. Another note-taker attended the interview and took notes on the conversation. The interview lasted one hour, with the participant's teenage daughter arriving at the end of the session. The daughter then joined in un-recorded conversation about her desire not to enter farming as an occupation.

The interview with the divorced woman took place via the telephone. I used the same questions as I had used for the MW group. This interview was not recorded, but I did take notes during the conversation.

Data Analysis

Data for the recorded sessions was analyzed from the digital recordings. Digital and other types of technology are becoming increasingly employed with focus groups sessions (Debreceeny, Putterill, Tung and Gilbert, 2003, Easton, Easton and Belch 2003, Parent, Gallupe, Salisbury and Handelman 2000, Catterall and Maclaren 1997, Clappper and Massey 1996). I used the recordings as the raw data from which I conducted the analysis. Transcriptions were also done, yet they were a secondary source of analysis. This method was pioneered primarily by market researchers searching for more holistic and interpretive techniques of analysis (Catterall and Maclaren 1997). Verbal and written speech are unique forms of communication that lend themselves to different types of analysis (Guirdham 1999, Lemke 1998, Howell and Vetter 1985, Trager 1964). Transcriptions, though traditionally used as the sole or primary method of analyzing verbal data, have several significant drawbacks.

The process of transcription creates a new text whose relations to the original data are problematic. What is preserved? What is lost? What is changed? Just the change of medium from speech to writing alters our expectations and perceptions of language...Transcription at the level of the word...erases information about emphasis, value-orientation, degree of certainty or doubt, attitude of surprise or expectability, irony, humor, emotional force, speaker identity, and speaker dialect or

language background...In addition, information about the timing of speech (length of pauses, simultaneous speech, sudden breaking-off of fluency, overlaps, etc.) is often important (Lemke 1998:2).

As such, use of verbal data in recorded form allows for a more complete treatment of both lexical and non-lexical factors. "Normal human speech...consists of two simultaneous sets of cues: the articulated sound patterns that convey semantically meaningful material (words, phrases, sentences), and the discriminable qualitative features of the voice itself" (Howell 1985:89). By employing digital recordings as raw data, I was able to capture both aspects of participants' speech.⁷ Despite their shortcomings, transcriptions do have a role to play in data evaluation. Written language is able to lay open aspects of conversation that the brain does not readily process with verbal information (Lemke 1998:2).¹

What sounds perfectly sensible and coherent may look in transcription (any transcription) confused and disorganized. What passes by in speech so quickly as not to be noticed, or is replaced by the listener's expectations of what should have been said is frozen and magnified in transcription" (Ibid.).

To examine the digital recordings, I went through a multi-stage process of listening and note-taking. Listening to each focus group session in full, without segregating "relevant" information from the rest of the conversation is the first step. Then, each recording is listened to, in its entirety, for one particular topic at a time. The process is repeated for each topic of interest. When important passages arise, notes were taken as to the gist of the expression and the time at which it occurs in the recording. Repeated listening to the occurrence of each topic and reviewing notes forms the basis for drawing conclusions about the content of the focus group.

For the telephone interview notes were taken of the conversation, including as many non-lexical features as possible. Notes were then coded and used to draw conclusions.

⁷ Digital recording, as opposed to conventional recording, largely makes this method possible. With a digital recording, one is able to make bookmarks of specific sections and readily skip to those. Conventional recordings, with the large amounts of tape that must be wound and rewound, make this technique slow and impractical.

Participant Demographics

Table 1: Widowed Women Focus Group Demographics

<i>Demographic characteristic</i>	<i>Participant 1</i>	<i>Participant 2</i>	<i>Participant 3</i>	<i>Participant 4</i>
Occupation	Personnel specialist	Farmer	Retired	Participant left blank
Employment status	Unemployed	Retired	Retired	Retired
Live on a farm now	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Grew up on a farm	Participant left blank	Yes	No	Yes
Consider themselves farmers	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Marital status	Widowed	Widowed	Widowed	Widowed
Year of birth	1944	1924	1934	1937
Number of years of education	12	16	16	12 – 13

Table 2: Married Women Interview Demographics

<i>Demographic characteristic</i>	<i>Participant 1</i>
Occupation	High school food service and activity director
Employment status	Full-time
Live on a farm now	Yes
Grew up on a farm	Yes
Consider themselves farmers	No
Marital status	Now married
Year of birth	1956
Number of years of education	13
Pseudonym	Trish

Table 3: Married Women Focus Group Demographics

Demographic characteristic	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5	Participant 6	Participant 7
Occupation	Retired farm assistant; part time farm business association analyst	Administrative assistant	Volunteer	USDA employee and farm housewife	Farm wife – customer service manager	Realtor	Homemaker
Employment status	Homemaker	Full-time	Homemaker	Retired; partnership with husband operate grain elevator	Full-time	Full-time	Homemaker
Live on a farm now	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Grew up on a farm	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No - "owned one but lived in town"	No	Yes
Consider themselves farmers	No	No - "part time"	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes - "?"
Marital status	Now married	Now married	Now married	Now married	Now married	Now married	Now married
Year of birth	1937	1955	1936	1938	1956	1945	1941
Number of years of education	12	12+	16+	13	15	13	12

Table 4: Agency Personnel Focus Group Demographics

<i>Demographic characteristic</i>	<i>Participant 1</i>	<i>Participant 2</i>	<i>Participant 3</i>	<i>Participant 4</i>	<i>Participant 5</i>
Number of years in position	3.5	20	7	5	8

Table 5: Divorced Women Interview Demographics

<i>Demographic characteristic</i>	<i>Participant 1</i>
Occupation	Quality assurance
Employment status	Semi-retired
Live on a farm now	No – “but did for many years”
Grew up on a farm	No
Consider themselves farmers	Yes
Marital status	Divorced
Year of birth	Late 1930s
Number of years of education	12
Pseudonym	Grace

Results and Discussion

After reviewing focus group and interview data, a number of common themes emerged.⁸ The most striking theme is the importance of personal relationships with information transfer. Talking with spouses, friends and neighbors seemed to be the most central way in which women of all ages acquired knowledge to make decisions about their land. Persons women know were the most trusted sources of information, while strangers and/or impersonal information sources were the least trusted. Additionally, culturally pervasive forms of gender bias continue to shape the environment within which women gain and use information. The complex nature of government programs, limited time and isolation were additional barriers to women's knowledge acquisition. Stage in life and home responsibilities (outside job, presence or absence of children and/or spouse) seem to have an impact on the best ways for women to receive information about their land.

The government agency participants' understanding of women landowners' circumstances are congruent, in a number of respects, with findings from the women's focus groups and interviews. Agency personnel did understand the importance of personal relationships for information transfer, that time limitations present an obstacle for women landowners, that generational differences exist in how women approach their land ownership and that government programs are confusing. Yet, agency respondents' conceptions of women landowners' situations diverged in at least one key way from the experience of the women themselves. Agency personnel explicitly dismissed gender as a factor influencing information exchange and decision-making. Even so, agency respondents did shed light on potentially exploitive aspects of landlord/ tenant relationships that did not seem readily acknowledged by the female participants.

⁸ Notation for reporting responses: Respondent's words are in italics. Researcher's comments and questions during the interview are set off in brackets and bolded. Researcher's input to provide context for respondents' comments, added while writing results, is in brackets only (not in bold). Other nonlinguistic information is set off in asterisks, for example, *Laughter.* In addition, any words that would compromise anonymity for respondents have been deleted and replaced by two asterisks. I have tried to maintain the integrity of people's responses by leaving quotes in their raw form, not "cleaned-up" by removing stops and starts, etc. However, for brevity and clarity, when sections of speech have been deleted, this removal is indicated by an ellipsis. When participants' sentences stopped abruptly without expressing a complete thought, two dashes are placed at the end of the last word. When participants referred to others by name, those names have been changed. Female landowner respondents will be referred to by an assigned pseudonym, followed with codes for the group or interview in which they participated, codes are as follows: "MWFG" is the married woman's focus group. "MWI" is the married woman's interview; "WWFG" is the widowed women's focus group; "DWI" is the divorced woman's interview. Agency personnel will be referred to by a pseudonym and "AFG."

Female respondents' most significant sources of information about their land are the persons they know personally. Particularly important are relationships with their family members and tenants (for landlords), most of whom are male. For married women, their spouses are most significant; for widowed women and the divorced respondent, their tenants and children are their main resource. Spouses and tenants, often being most involved with the operation and the main information gatherers, sort, filter and influence information that is then communicated to the female participants. Unsurprisingly, women respondents' main sources for information were also their most trusted.

Married women respondents often reported that their spouses were a main source of information, and/or spoke of information primarily accessed by their spouses as sources for them also. Women referred to their husbands' bringing information home, providing explanation and at times, contradicting other information the women had gained. Participants also frequently mentioned their husbands as their most trusted information resource, whether or not they had originally listed them as a source.

Well, I don't have hours everyday to spend at the co-op and the coffee shop, hearing what everybody else thinks, which seems to be a big source of information. Um...we have a couple websites which I rarely look at unless Dave asks me to pull 'em out. I seldom read the markets in the paper. Uh, I think he uses all of the above, plus, his own. Cash flow and, you know, the moisture and the, or whatever you-- what is it?.... Mostly, I guess, he is my source of information. – Sue, MWFG

[Referring to her husband:] I don't know what he trusts. I figure whatever decision he makes is probably going to be okay. There's some people, I'm sure, or some things that he looks at more than others. But, I really don't know. – Jamie, MWFG

I do trust my husband a lot, as he's pretty thoughtful about things. – Evelyn, MWFG

Mike [her husband] has access to Dataline, they have it at the bank, you know, so he's always watching that. – Sarah, MWFG

[After a previous comment about Extension:] Along with that, of course, my husband's work. You know, [he works] in a farm related occupation, so we're very fortunate to have connections there. – Trish, MWI

[With respect to a comment about chemicals made by a previous respondent:] *That's an area that my husband takes care of totally and so if I had to say my source-- he would be my source. Or, he's an avid listener to KMA, and so, you know, we do a lot of radio and that kind of stuff, but other than that... he's the only one that I--, I don't care to read the magazines.* – Amelia, MWFG

You know I always think my farmer husband has so many hats that he has to wear. He has to be knowledgeable of so many things and um, it ends up being his gut feeling. And a lot of times when we started our chicken business, we were like, the only people out here doing that and that was scary. He called lots of people from Iowa State, he talked to Neil Harl and the man who does poultry up there, I can't think of his name right now. But they were real good sources of information for him. And the Extension service has always been a good source too. My husband's commissioner on the soil conservation and so that's been real important and he goes along with most of their thoughts on that. – Barb, MWFG

But I think that a lot of information comes from word of mouth of who's doing what and when and, um, the coffee shop thing. – Evelyn, MWFG

I would say I probably trust Mike [her husband] the most as far as the farm, you know. – Sarah, MWFG

The widowed participants, as well as the divorced participant, all rent their land to others. For them, their tenants were their main and most trusted information resources. In some instances, their children also provided information. Though the participants all stated that they were the ultimate decision-makers with their land, their renters were the ones who made the day-to-day decisions.

I trust the tenants the most...I do have very good tenants, so I am very comfortable with them.. I have very strong church affiliations with my renter, he's about the same age as my son, and he was always very, very trustworthy, even as a young man. – Grace, DWI

And, but, he [her husband] and the neighbor, the man that's cash renting my land now, had owned a combine for many, many years, so Bill knew that he farmed no till. So at the present time Bill has been farming this land as, like my Scott used to farm it. So, until he no longer farms it, then I don't

*have to make a decision about what needs to be done with it. [Okay, because you trust him to make the right decision?] Yes, he just knew how my Scott took care of things and, of course, then he's in charge, with the cash rent, of taking care of the land and seeing what chemicals and stuff need to be put on it. So basically, it's been kind of nice since my husband passed away to have Bill in charge of it because-- I haven't had a lot of decisions to make other than, you know, just cash renting the land. Of course, my husband told me that, before he passed away. [That this is what you should do?] He said I should cash rent the land; there'd be less decisions to make. And I did go through quite a bit the year before he died because he died before harvest. And of course, we had all these wonderful people that came in and harvested the beans and the corn and took care of that stuff for me and-- But I still had to make the decision about selling it and I was glad that was all over with so, *Laugh* I am one most glad that I cash rented it. 'Cause it takes a lot of worries. – Emily, WWFG*

I guess maybe I could say I make most of the decisions however, um, we do, I do share rent and a man that does my farming, he's done that for twenty-one years. And, we, I think that we, we get together every once and a while. In fact, his wife is more or less taking over business part of it, which I think is a good idea. And so anyway we get together and, like, she takes care of all the work through the government agencies and helps with that and then last--, then--. But then they just go ahead, see they just farm soybeans and corn. So that isn't so bad. But then we decided to put some land in CRP last year and they helped me with all that. – Deborah, WWFG

And my sons are also involved in helping with the decision making. [How does everyone work together to make the decisions?] As far as, uh, communicating...? [Yeah] Well, we live in close proximity so we're, you know, visiting all the time about, you know, what's going on with the decisions. Like I say, there's not a whole lot of day-to-day decisions based on, uh, the long term program that I'm involved in, however, currently they're releasing some of the CRP ground for grazing and so then you have to follow through with some of the paperwork and that type of thing. [Who would do that paperwork?] Um, I--, my sons had, um, gotten the papers from the soil conservation office and then he brought them to me to sign and I faxed them to another individual to sign and then he will present it before the board. So he's pretty much involved with that. – Beth, WWFG

Government agency participants also understand the extent to which landlords rely on their tenants.

Janet: *It seems like I work a lot with the tenants when they do farm plans, revisions, a lot of the times, male and female landowners alike. A lot of times it's like, "Well, whatever the tenant wants," you know. "Write the plan for them, not for what I want," you know. And, but, like with the ** I would agree with the guys that it's usually they want it, they know what they want. But, for basic farm things it seems like I work a lot with the tenants and not the--, more so than the landowners...*

[Why do you think it would be that the landowner just says do it the way the tenant wants?]

Adam: *I think they probably just figure the tenant is handling his own and he's farming her land so let him make the decision and he tells her what his decisions are. They probably talk it over and, you know, it sounds good to her, why, go with it.*

Bob: *They look at him as an expert.*

Adam: *Yeah.*

Bob: *In a lot of ways, I mean, it's like, probably the same reason a person would hire a farm manager for advice, a lot of people look, I think, as, at a renter in some ways as a farm manager. And that person has a way that they farm their own land and a lot of people probably think that if they farm their own land that way, then that's the way I probably want him farming my land. And so, whatever they want to do is okay. I don't think it's a way that they're dismissing--*

Adam: *No.*

Bob: *The importance of their land. They just trust them, you know. – AFG*

Aside from spouses and tenants, other personal relationships played significant roles in information exchange and decision-making.

My brother's sort of helped me along the line but, uh, he doesn't I mean-- He'll say well, "You ought to do this, you better do this," or something but he doesn't really help make any definite decisions. Like, we went to sell off some pasture and some land with wooded area with a creek to the neighbor that had just a little bit. He didn't want us to sell it but we decided. I have a son but he lives in Iowa City. He's not interested in farming but he hopes to go back and take it over some day. Anyway, we decided that we'd sell that little bit of land for, I think it was eleven hundred dollars... Well, then this summer, then it came up that, "Shall we, keep the land or shall we sell it?" You know how people or your relatives tell you, "You better do this, you better"--. And then we had just, somebody would be interested in buying our land and then when my son came home we, and his wife, we sat down and

talked about it and he says, "Well, I think we should keep our land in the family." Because we didn't need the cash or the money right now. – Deborah, WWFG

Probably rely on, my two sons. And uh, I think with my situation and I'm not involved with anything based in the CRP. So you don't have a lot of decision-making other than, you know, currently, if the grazing became available you'd need to go ahead and do some paperwork regarding that to be able to do that. Other than that keep up with the farm payments, pay the taxes, do the income taxes. That type of thing. So as far as-- You know I would say, I work with a local banker. – Beth, WWFG

*Well, I have to tell you after Scott's death the bank really helped me quite a bit. Of course, that wasn't my first thought. I wanted to get the loan. But luckily Scott had some insurance policies that helped do that. And, basically, the information I'm getting now is from friends that farm and they're male; they're still farming. So if I have questions I either ask my renter, Bill, or get together a couple of other farmer friends and they're willing to help me. They don't tell me what to do. They don't want to get involved in it either, I don't think. *Laugh* But I can kind of sort out the-- But then if I have some questions I want to know, I come here to the-- *Laugh* What is it? FSA now? [Other participant: Yeah, FSA now.] And the girls in there are usually pretty good to tell you. I haven't hit 'em with the farm program yet. *Laugh* I haven't come in yet and said, "Could you explain this to me?" -- Emily, WWFG*

Well, probably my most trusted sources would be, my son and my son-in-law. My son is still, I mean, he, he loves agriculture and he stayed in agriculture although he can't farm. But this is what-- And then my son-in-law. And then I didn't think I would ever say this, but, uh, the banker. Because he has, they have all become close friends. You know, so I see things in different ways. At first, to me, the banker was the enem--, part of the enemy, you know. – Viola, WWFG

I have a good relationship with the ASCS [formerly FSA] office, but government in general I don't trust as much as I would individual people. – Grace, DWI

Emily: Well, the Extension office puts out a newsletter. I get that; and I enjoy that.

Viola: The Extension?

Emily: Isn't that one of them?

Viola: You get one from Extension?

Emily: *Yeah.*

Deborah: *I get more conservation office stuff.*

Viola: *Well, I get one from FSA, and one from the FHA office.*

Deborah: *Yeah, yeah.*

Emily: *Well, mine it comes from... it has Pat somebody in it. And the Nichols girl. And, is it from the Teal?*

Emily: **[Yeah, Alan Teal is the director.]** *Alan Teal.*

Deborah: *Oh, Alan Teal, I don't get that one. I used to. – WWFG*

My sources that I would trust, I've got a brother in the business down in Griswald and he's a great source that my husband talks to him a lot...And then also my dad, who's very, very, very knowledgeable, we go to him just an awful lot. – Amelia, MWFG

*Um...my sister's president of the **, so I get a lot of stuff from her. Sam...we have two k--, son's at Iowa State. I told you that, he's always coming home with these new wild ideas and I say, "Okay, let's see how this works out financially, Sam." You know, I,I,I--no. You know? *Other person giggles* You know? I mean, he's got a lot of great ideas that he-- But you've got to make them pencil too. – Sarah, MWFG*

*Our son is at **, which is a chemical company, and he always lets us know, too, what's going on that way. So, that's our other source of chemicals anyway. – Barb, MWFG*

Other, impersonal, sources of information that participants listed include the magazines *Successful Farming*, *Farm Journal*, *ProFarmer*, *Iowa Farmer*, *Progressive Farmer*, *Wallace Farmer*, *Harpers Weekly*, *Farm Industry News*, *Angus Journal* and *Top Producer*. The Natural Resource Conservation Service was also referred to several times, as was Farm Service Agency, bankers, the local radio station (KMA), lawyers, ISU Extension, professors at Iowa State (Mike Duffy and Neil Harl, specifically) and the Dataline. The Dataline was a major source of information for at least two women. A number of participants listed the Internet, also.

Agency personnel did understand the importance of personal relationships for information transfer, both between staff and clients and between clients themselves. Both staff and landowner participants

also recognized that personal connections can also interfere with information delivery, especially because agents are reluctant to “get in the middle” of clients’ relationships.

When we talked about how we’ve done special outreach in the past, one thing that we never think about because it’s not, like, a formal thing, is what I’d call outreach that’s just done by individuals. These people here, they all live in communities. And people in the community know. And those would be male landowners and female landowners and those people come up to them at church, at the grocery store, at the gas station and they ask questions all the time. And that prob--, that kind of outreach goes on all the time. And that probably is, probably one of the most effective ways-- I would—No, I’ll take it back. It is probably the, the most effective way. But, you can’t do that in large enough numbers all the time, of course, to, you know, get the job done. And get as much information disseminated out as we need to. But, I got to believe it’s the most effective way of doing it. – Bob (supervisor), AFG

*Unfortunately they also, I had this one landowner in particular from the city, she always asked me what she should be charging for cash rent. *Laugh* And that’s something we don’t get into and every time I talked to her, that’s the first thing she said, “Do you think I’m not asking enough in cash rent?” I can’t tell you. That’s not our, place. To tell you how much to charge. You want to know how--, ... We’re the place. But, I’m not getting in the--, between you and your tenant. *Chuckle* That’s for you two to figure out. – Janet, AFG*

[In reference to not always finding appropriate sources of information:]

Emily: *Sometimes they [agency personnel] act like they don’t want to commit to, to where you could say, “Well, so and so told me I should get this much for it.” You know. So they say, “Well I don’t know,” you know. ‘Cause they don’t want to get involved. I’ve had some of that happen to me.*

Viola: *Oh yeah.*

Deborah: *See the trouble of it is, is that we know those people who work in those offices. *Laugh* – WWFG*

Sources of information that women participants did not trust were nearly all impersonal sources, though bankers and lawyers were persons women knew personally and still distrusted. In addition, several women participants distrusted the “coffee shop” talk that their husbands pick up. For the most part, respondents did not report many distrusted sources, and several did not report any. However,

during the married woman's focus group, a lengthy discussion developed around environmental and animal rights groups. A strong amount of distrust and animosity was expressed toward such groups.⁹

Jamie: *Yeah I was having a hard time thinking of something I didn't trust. But, PETA is the one I don't trust. *Laughter* I don't believe anything they say. *Laughter* [People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals?] Right. I don't have any, any--*

Barb: *Any use for them at all.*

Evelyn: *Right. And Greenpeace. Um, they are kooks as far as I'm concerned. I hope you're not a member! *Laughter**

Jamie: *Sierra Club. Some of the environmental groups that are so far out.*

Emily: *So far out, yeah.*

Jamie: *I don't trust those. Somebody who I do trust, Neil Harl is one I have a lot of respect for what he has, information. And Mike Duffy too. Um, I guess, like they say, just take what information and try to ball it all over and pick out what works for us as individuals. Uh, we had a hard lesson. Um, I can't remember what year it was. They came out and they, the Chicago Board of Trade and were pushing the Hedge-to-Arrive contracts. And nine out of ten years you're going to be ahead. So we tried it and that was the year-- *Sympathetic Noises* It went backwards, you know! So, that was the only year we tried it, but it was not a, a good-- So, no I don't really trust the Chicago Board of Trade either. *Soft Laughter* [So, who recommended that you try that? Was that--] That was... I believe it came from the bank. Uh, but they sponsored it and the fellows were out of Cedar Rapids, maybe? [Okay.] A brokerage company, so. Yeah, I'm skeptical of brokers. – MWFG*

*So, the bad things is about the same as what you think too. *Laughter* PETA and those organizations, coffee shop talk. – Judy, MWFG*

*And the ones I don't trust are the same. [In reference to environmental groups] And some salesmen, I don't trust some salesman. I don't want them around. *Laughter* –Amelia, MWFG.*

⁹ At least some of the discussion was spurred by the fact that a participant had had a Monsanto test plot destroyed by Greenpeace some years earlier.

*Uh, probably the least [trusted] would be coffee shop. *Chuckling* And some politicians. And, some of our media I don't. It isn't on the bottom of my list, but I don't believe everything on the media. – Laura, MWFG*

*[Now, who would you be less likely to trust?] Someone I didn't know. *Laugh* – Deborah, WWFG*

Anyway, I thought, you know, the banker knew what the situation was at our house. They knew what my husband's health was; I took care of some of them at the hospital. "Why did you loan that money to my husband and son?" You know, why?! But then, there's a lot I found out later, a lot of 'em got caught the same way. [A lot of other farmers, you mean?] A lot of other farmers, yeah, with the interest rates.

Deborah: In the '80s.

Viola: Yeah.

Deborah: From what I gathered, that's what they taught at Iowa State University.

Viola: That's right.

Deborah: You're supposed to borrow a lot of money, and farm big.

Viola: That's right. The bigger you got, the better it was. Well, the bigger you got, the more you had to lose. And that's exactly what happened, and so to me, the banker was the enemy. – WWFG

[Trusts] Newspapers the least, because they sometimes get their facts screwed-up. – Grace, DWI

The discussion of trust in the widowed women's group prompted conversation about sexism when women seek information about their land.

Emily: I knew I was in trouble from the first day we had the first visit and I thought, "This guy is a chauvinist." He thinks women should not have anything.

*Deborah: Yeah, Some people think women don't know anything. *Laugh**

Emily: Well, I had one for a lawyer. And when he hit me with that, "Well, it was really all Scott's anyway," I thought, ooh boy. [That's hard to hear.] Well, it is when you--, I used plow ground, chop stalks, put bails of hay in it, I worked like a man.

Viola: You're a partner on the farm.

Emily: So, and he wouldn't consider that, the first year he made up my income tax. *Laugh* I was a housewife.

Viola: Oh, really?

Emily: And I said, "Well, I really thought I was a farmer." So the next year I had somebody else do my taxes and she says, "Well, what do you consider yourself". I says, "I'm a farmer." I'm either a farmer or a landowner. I says, "I worked for that farm as well as Scott did." So, she put me down as a farmer. *Laugh*

Emily: Well, you see, Scott and I have always farmed. So when we did the income tax, the social security all went under his name.

Beth: Okay that's what I wa--.

Emily: I've alw--, I always--. Women are discriminated against.

Beth: Especially with Social Security.

Emily: Well, that's true and I didn't like it like that, because I thought-- Well, evidently what I thought wasn't right when I got to the lawyer. *Chuckle* Because, I considered Scott and I partners in farming. That's why I never worked off of the farm. I worked, and I concluded I was partners in this farming thing. Well then when we made our income tax out that was filed jointly, um, so then that's when I found out that social security all went under Scott's name. **[Even when you filed taxes jointly?]** Right. And so then, whenever -- and of course we had asked the lawyers and stuff about how we should do, this and so I had my name on most everything except some land that my husband had inherited before he died. And the lawyer looked at me and said, "Well, you might of thought that was right, but that isn't the way it was". And I wanted to say, "What did we pay you all that money for?"...I have no love for lawyers. Especially that one because I called him when Scott died.

Beth: They're supposed to have your best interests at heart.

Emily: Well, I went in there and I said to him, I says, "Well," I says, "My name was on everything except for the land that Scott inherited from his mother." And he looked at me and says, "Well, yeah, but it was all really Scott's anyway." And when he said that, I thought, "Emily, you're in trouble; he's a chauvinist." And he was. **[But unfortunately, you didn't find this out until after Scott had died.]** That's right. And I'm telling you. And my husband has a sister. She lived in Wisconsin but Scott was the executor to his mother's estate. Well, when he passed away, I thought his sister should have that job because she was the daughter. Well, he says, "Oh, no. I think you ought to take care of it." And I thought, "Oh yeah, because you think you can just walk right over me?" *Laughter* No, needless to say. I don't have the love for lawyers. You know all those years we went to the lawyer

and asked him how should we do this in case something happens to one of us and then they tell us-- And, now I'm thinking, well, when you go there and you ask them that they'll say, "Now how should I do this for myself?"...This is why we need some kind of a basis, other basis besides going to the lawyer for information.

Viola: Information you can trust.

Emily: Right. – WWFG

Perhaps more significant than the above overt examples of sexism are the subtler, yet pervasive, day-to-day gender-related biases. For the women landowner participants, this discrimination included decisions being negated by others, criticism of actions and decisions and double-standards with decision-making and control of the farming operation. In addition, women participants practiced a great deal of self-censorship, self-deprecation and self-constraint with decision-making and information acquisition.

*Sue: Uh. I try to avoid it [decision-making]. *Laughter* Well, our son is really now the farmer and I think the two of them having their own discussions is probably enough. Um, and then this other little farm it's-- There's enough people running it too *chuckle* that they really don't need-- Except I, like, "Should we cash rent, or crop share?" has been a topic that I want to keep bringing up, but um. So, actually, nobody pays much attention me. *Laughter**

Evelyn: Oh, about the same.

*Sue: *Laugh* Probably a good thing, in my role, anyway.*

*Evelyn: Yeah, well. Um...Martin is farming now and we are kind of um, semi-retired with that too. And uh, when Dale, when, of course, he first started farming with us, Martin would, you know, the two of them would be talking and I'd be listening there and trying to keep up with what they were saying and everything, and I thought, "This is just kind of ridiculous." *Laugh* They'd go over and.... So, I don't, uh, don't worry about it. I just kind of let them make their decisions and uh... get along with that. – WWFG*

*I didn't put down I was a farmer because I don't even know how many acres it is and, um-- *Soft Laughter* Then uh, I just recently inherited half of a hundred acre farm and it's up by ** City. And, uh, my brother is up there so he's sort of taking care of it, although...he said for me to make the decision about the, selling the grain. But, as soon as I made the decision-- I thought, the rest of 'em*

got together and thought, "Well, that wasn't the best decision" and so -- *Laughter* I didn't care! I didn't want the blame anyway. *Chuckle* So, anyway, that's, that's my situation. – Sue, MWFG

I don't make any of the decisions. I just, uh, do whatever he says to do. Sign my name when he says to sign it. *Laughter* –Amy, MWFG

Amelia: And so when we first got married I always told my husband that I could drive a tractor, meaning the kind you push in the clutch with your feet and did the gear shift-- er, did the, the accelerator here on the steering wheel. Well the tractor we had, had a hand clutch, that my husband bought. So, the first time I got on it and he said, "Why don't y--," and we were scooping out manure in a chicken shed and he said, "Why don't you move it forward a little bit." And I rammed it right into the chicken shed, and *Laughter* I've never been on a tractor since. *Laughter* No more of that! *Laughter*

Barb: They think you should automatically know how to do it, but they never give you instructions.

Amelia: I didn't figure out this thing, and I didn't know how it worked and, so--. *Laughter* – MWFG

Well, pretty much, just the same as what she said. He asks me, I never know. I think he uses me as a sounding board and it's nice that he does that. Um, I take care of the books too and I usually can know where to spend the money without any problem. *Laughter* But um, as far as the--, and he's really good about asking me, but I usually don't know. You know, we talk it over and try to see if we want to buy more land or more of this or more of that and -- It's pretty much up to him whatever we decide to do, I mean it's fine with me. **[So when you say you usually don't know, do you mean you usually don't know the answers to the questions he's asking you?]** I don't know as I know any more than he does. So, you know, we talk it over and he thinks through things very clearly and very thoroughly. So, by the time that he even brings it up to me, I know he's already mulled it over a tremendous amount, and he makes very good decisions. So, a lot of times I'll go along with what he says just because I know he's already done the thought process. – Amelia, MWFG

The farm. The dirt. I don't do dirt. *Laughter* I don't do dirt. I don't. Um, as far as, you know, financially, those things, because he is a banker [husband], you know, and the marketing of that, that's his, his deal. I'm the one that runs into the SCS [NRCS] office because I'm town and I just sign all kinds of stuff. "What do I sign?.. Okay. Cool." You know, I have no idea what I sign. But

*when it comes to the cattle, then it's a different ball of wax. Those are my babies. Um, I make a lot of decisions as far as the cattle; which one's we're keeping for bulls, which one's we're keeping for replacement heifers. And we just, we kind of got it down to a deal. But I like I said, I don't do dirt. *Chuckling* Tractors, eh-- [No. Not any of--?] No. But I'm the one that's-- Well, I was the one out there last night with the vet pulling the calf...Anyway, that's where I am in the decision making. You know, I mean, when we talk which bulls we're going to see when we're going to buy or whatever. If we're going to scan the bulls we're going to do something most those decisions I make and say, "Oh, by the way, I made an appointment for," and you know, he's fine with it. And if he's going to plant beans, that's cool. I -- don't do dirt. – Sarah, MWFG*

*[Same participant who doesn't "do dirt":] I keep seeing these neat ideas and I want to try 'em, you know, like these tree farms. "Can't I have about four acres out there that's the bad area, you know?" "Can I have that four acres and plant blue spruce and make a little Christmas tree farm?" And, I'm on fourth generation his family farm, so it's kind of, you know. *Grunting* But, I, you know, that's where I want to try more diversified little things like that and he doesn't quite see that. But I just think it'd be kind of neat to try some of them. You know, I just read all these articles over Christmas time, and then of course, I got on the Internet and was finding out about tree farms and I just thought it would be really fun to try some of that. But, he doesn't like that. I've actually got two sons that are avid hunters, you know. And I just think that'd be kind of neat. "Couldn't we just stick that little edge off that little pasture?". And there's kind of a little wet area down there, half the time you can't plant it anyway and I just -- But, I haven't finished trying persuasion. *Chuckling* I have to get more facts before I--, and then I can maybe try. – Sarah, MWFG*

I was always wanting to go to school and Frank thought it was a waste of time and money. And finally one day, I said, "Well, you know, the way you're always wanting more land, I'm always wanting to learn more things." Well, he finally understood that then. Because he just thought wanting to learn something that was not going to make you money was no good reason to do it. So, um, I guess that's what made him understand. – Sue, MWFG

*Laura: My theory is if you sell for a profit, you'll never go broke. *Laughter* But see then-- But, sometimes my husband wants to wait, and--.*

Barb: Does it become a game with them then?

Laura: *He says, "Well, maybe it'll go up tomorrow," according to what he's read or something, and I thought, "Okay." But we, we both had our input and I just see that he has the finale on it and I can say, "See, I told you so." *Laughter** [Participant earlier commented that she and her husband make decisions "50/50."]

Amelia: *He did that once with beans. We held beans for an extr--, I won't say how long, but it was an extraordinary amount of time. And I said to him at one point, "I really think we need to sell it now." And he goes, "No, we're not going to just yet. I just want to wait." And then from that time on, it went down.*

Laura: *Yeah, I know it.*

Amelia: *But, who's to say I would be right next time. – MWFG*

And water concerns me some, I guess, and I shouldn't say this with my husband working in the chemical business, but you know, you hear some stories of our water being affected by that so I-- That's a concern of mine. Definitely. [So have you ever discussed that concern with your husband at all?] Oh yes. Um. [The chemicals?] Yeah. Well, I think he feels, um, they've got regulations on, of course, how much can be applied with chemicals and fertilizer and things. So I, I, I feel they're being well trained too. I mean, it's not just a job that they sell this stuff and put it on. They have schooling. And, and they really do have to know what they're doing. – Trish, MWI.

*Well, we discussed things pretty much between the two of us about things. We always went to the State Fair and went through the machinery. *Laughter* So if it meant buying farm equipment, why, he always involved me in to that end. And I guess he, he used to ask me about, well, we talk about no-till and I says, "Well." I told him, I said, "I don't know about that," because I says, "You know, when I had my garden and I go out and used to hoe it and it would just grow." *Laughs* Seemed like it'd grow overnight. And I says, now, I says, "You don't do anything to the land," I says, "those poor little plants look like they just -- taken a long time to go, to get off the ground." But he went ahead and no-tilled, it didn't make any difference to him *Laughter* what I thought. But, he most generally would ask or talk to me about it. Get my thoughts and then he always did what he wanted. *Chuckles* – Emily, WWFG*

[With respect to decision-making before husband's death:] *Well, I really didn't have too much to say. Because um my, my husband was a bachelor farmer for years. And he just went ahead and did what he wanted to do. But he would discuss things like when we'd buy a new tractor and, you know, and*

*things like that. But otherwise, you know, really I didn't get involved too much. He'd just go ahead. I mean, I did help with the, with the farm records but, I didn't help outside much either. 'Cause he was used to doing it his own way all his life. *Chuckle* – Deborah, WWFG*

*I wasn't involved in the farm management at all before my husband's death. Um, that was, I mean I did the physical part of things and, and he, that was his, that's what kept him going is, you know, he managed things and I left it that way. And also he farmed his parent's ground too and it was best that I st--, there was things I didn't agree with. But it was best to just leave it alone. Just let them do, you know, what, what they wanted to do. And so I, I, it's just best to, you know, just don't say anything. Just let it go. If he was happy, if my husband was happy, the whole family was happy! *Laugh* *Laughter* If he was unhappy--*Laugh* – Viola, WWFG*

[With respect to differences with her former husband:] *I think that I'm more conservation prone than he is. He was more into buying machinery and making money. I never needed to make a lot of money, as long as we made an adequate amount to make things work. – Grace, DWI*

I think probably the biggest difference, Pernell, that we have, is when Clifford and I first started, which is probably 40 years ago, everything had to go outside, nothing inside. And sometimes, today it's still that way. I always hear, "The money, it comes from the outside," not from anything that I buy inside. But, we-- I'm not complaining, we-- our home is comfortable, and like Amelia said, you want your home comfortable. – Laura, MWFG

We get a lot of, like, there was just one from Monsanto about this new, uh, biotech corn for root worm. Did you guys jus--, did anyone--, you know, there's always all these neat flyers that come from these. And half the time Mike doesn't remember and I do, and I was like, "Did you know about this? Did you know about this? 'Cause I have proof and I can always teach ya.." You know, and then he'll, then he'll explain it to me or whatever, you know. – Sarah, MWFG.

Aside from the above overt and more subtle barriers to the women participants' involvement with their land, other obstacles also hinder information acquisition. These barriers mostly break down by stage in life (i.e., with or without children and/or a spouse in the home). Yet, the complicated nature of government programs crossed all groups. Time constraints were most important for married

women and social isolation was most significant for women without spouses (both widows and the divorced participant).

Deborah: *Isn't it tonight they're having a meeting on the Farm Program?*

Emily: *Oh, is it? I don't know.*

Beth: *Oh I don't know. I probably should go, but I wouldn't understand it, but--*

Emily: *Well, I've kind of left that to my renter to find out. It's quicker for him to find out and then he's going to tell me all about it, so we can do all that signing in April of 2003.*

Viola: *Well, I went to the meeting out at the 4-H club.*

Emily: *Oh, did you?*

Viola: *Yeah, and then a week later I read they really changed it all. *Laugh* It wasn't what they told us at the 4-H club.*

Deborah: *They'll probably change it all again next year.*

Viola: *It's a policy still in the making. We don't know.*

Deborah: *It's kind of complicated, I think. – WWFG*

[In reference to her statement about her knowing less about the operation than her husband:] *Um, when it comes to, like, the ASCS stuff and those things. [Government?] I do. Yes. I can't-- I'm not up on that very well. But you should be. *Quiet Voice* But I'm not. – Trish, MWI*

Government programs the tenant takes care of, though not the CRP. It's a very complicated program, and I'm just not up on it. I just let him make those decisions as long as it's not detrimental to the ground. – Grace, DWI

And I tell you if any of you are ever involved in FHA, it's a nightmare. It's a total, total nightmare. You can't believe anything they say. They change the rules all the time. But uh. That's the government for you. – Viola, WWFG

As far as financially, those things, because he is a banker, you know, and the marketing of that, that's his, his deal. I'm the one that runs into the SCS office because I'm in town and I just sign all kinds of stuff. "What do I sign?.. Okay. Cool." You know, I have no idea what I sign. -- Sarah, MWFG

Agency personnel respondents do recognize the complexity of their programs for their clients.

Bob: *And probably, the other, maybe the other barrier or limitation is just the getting started, you know. The, just, where to start? If you don't know where to start sometimes you just don't start 'cause it's too scary to take that first step.*

Janet: *Yeah, I agree. Well, I think a lot of, when they come into, like, our office or FSA, I'll speak for FSA too since they're not here on some of this. Um, you come in and if they don't know anything about what we do or about the program, we start talking like they have been here for years and they know everything we're talking about. And if they're too scared to say, "I don't know what that is," then you never realize they don't know it. And then you just keep going and then they leave and they never come back 'cause they're like, "Pfhh, I'll let my tenant take of that. That's way too difficult."*

Adam: *Right.*

Janet: *And I just think to slow down sometimes and say, instead of saying ** [acronym], say **[acronym spelled-out]. You know, instead of, I don't even know what they call the stuff at FSA anymore, with all their counter-cyclical stuff. But *chuckle* I'm sure it's very confusing to try and figure out and if you just take the time to explain things a little bit better especially if you get any inkling that they don't deal with it on a regular basis. You can sometimes tell when their eyes start glazing over and you're like, "You have no idea what I'm talking about do you?" *Laugh* And they say, "No, I don't," and then it's like, "Okay, let's start over." So, but that happens with some of my men landowners too.*

Adam: **Chuckle* Right.*

Janet: *We've had to start over. So. I think our acronyms are a big problem sometimes. – AFG*

Widowed women participants and the divorced participant also struggled with having few peers to talk with about land ownership issues. Thus, they were especially interested in small group meetings as a way of improving information delivery.

Beth: *I mean, it was a struggle, you know, when they [husbands] were here as far as your farming and trying to make it, you know. And the plans that you had made involving your kids and how excited they all were. And then you kind of-- Through '85 and some of those years and so it, yeah, sometimes it's just hard to get really pumped up about issues, or you know. That type of thing.*

Deborah: *Yup, yeah. Very true. It helps to have a discussion group.*

Beth: *Have some support.*

Deborah: *Yeah.*

Beth: *Have some support.*

Deborah: *'Cause, you know, a lot of time people I know, they aren't interested in farming.*

Beth: *Right. It's fewer and fewer.*

Deborah: *Some of 'em are, but there's very few. And if you start about it by then they say, "What are you talking about?" – WWFG*

Occasionally I talk with other farmers, but, less than I used to. I just don't have as much contact with them as I used to. – Grace, DWI

[In reference to how they could best receive information about their land:]

Viola: *Small group. Small group meetings. [Okay. Like, on a regular basis?] With somebody that knows what they're thinking.*

Emily: *Twice a year probably.*

Viola: *Somebody in authority.*

Deborah: *Maybe at sometime or another have a speaker on the-- I mean. Or a kind of a leader or-- I wouldn't say, I wouldn't say a speaker that gets up there and just talks, but-- *Laugh**

Viola: *A moderator.*

Deborah: *Somebody that could give sort of a--*

Viola: *Direction.*

Emily: *Give us an update on the information happening in the agriculture land. *Giggle**

Deborah: *And on this Farm Bill too. Something simple. Something simple.*

Emily: *Yes.*

Deborah: *Not a whole lot of information on ten pieces of paper. *Laugh**

Viola: *Yeah. True, true.*

Deborah: *But I mean something--*

Emily: *I don't want to read, I want you to tell me.*

Viola: *Yeah, yeah.*

Deborah: *Something basic.*

Viola: *Make it real basic.*

Deborah: *Basic. Yeah, and not a whole great big long--*

Viola: *Don't tell me what websites to get into in the computer and find out all this stuff, you know. You tell me.*

Emily: *That drives my mother. She says "What's a website?" She says "Everything's ww dot com."*

Deborah: *Oh, I can understand that.*

Emily: *She says, "What are those? Do you have that?"*

At the government agency focus group, small group meetings were discussed as an effective outreach tool, though this particular office is not using them.

Now one of the offices that I know has done an effort that they thought was very, very successful, was they went actually went out and did, what I'd call, community-based meetings. They worked with a, what they considered to be a community leader in maybe, like, a township instead of going countywide. Uh, it was a female landowner. They asked that person to invite to their home her neighbors and then the USDA representatives were invited to the house to help answer questions. So it was a small meeting hosted by...actually one of the neighbors and the only people that were there, from what my understanding was, was other female landowners in that neighborhood and we were there in attendance to help answer questions. And they thought that was very successful. – Bob (supervisor), AFG

At least one of the widowed women participants did use the Internet, though several expressed concern about using computers. We briefly discussed radio and newsletters as delivery methods, but these means received unenthusiastic responses.

Widowed women participants identified several gaps in their knowledge that they felt could be addressed more effectively. Participants want to know when to do what, who to ask when one has questions and they want baseline information about such things as how much to charge for cash rent or renting out a country home.

Deborah: *And maybe some sort of a guideline or a calendar or something that when you're supposed to be doing what. *Laugh* Like uh, like, for instance on these, uh, FSA programs, and all that. Like ones that-- We do get letters from there.*

Viola: *Yeah, the FSA always does have the dates in there and--*

Deborah: *Yeah, but, I mean, uh, Sometimes, maybe something, well. "Contact your FSA office on something" or, or to that effect.*

Viola: *Right, right.*

[So not so much a calendar with, like, farming practices. But when reports need to be in or applications due for government agencies. Is that what you're thinking?]

Deborah: *Yeah. Or maybe--*

Emily: *How soon you have to give your renter notice if you want to get rid of him.*

Deborah: *Yeah! Yeah! And another problem--*

Emily: *And it's September or March.*

Viola: *I think it's September.*

Emily: *See, I never can remember. – WWFG*

Deborah: *Well, I sort of answered it in the question before that, but then I was questioning that we, I thought that the Extension Service office ought to have a little bit more information. Or some source that, where we could go instead of asking, this that and the other.*

Viola: *I could get it, if I knew where to get it.*

Emily: *Instead of, like we say, like we were talking about, the branch. Instead of asking what does this or that person do? And what does that person do? There ought to be some information in the county that we could go to. – WWFG*

Deborah: *Now, I really don't go to the Extension office very much, but they probably have more information than you'd think. But, I was trying to find out if, I think I wrote this, find out about only a few things, like how much to charge for rent. But they didn't know what the kids at the uh, that is for renting the farm house. And they didn't know about how much it should be either or anything. And I mean, I didn't know where to go for information on that. [Right. I know they have some information on rented land values; I guess that wouldn't apply to houses.] Yeah, and see that's another thing that--*

Emily: *Well, my neighbor couldn't find out from anybody what the average cash rent on your land would be.*

Deborah: *No. I could never find that out either.*

Emily: *You can't go by what they'll pay.*

Deborah: *I was trying to find out how much cash your [my] land was worth, you know. – WWFG*

Married women participants expressed feeling a good deal of time pressure, which inhibits their information collection. So for them, meetings do not work. Many of the women participants agreed

that electronic information delivery would be convenient, such as daily or weekly emails and websites. Several married participants commented that they did not have time for reading magazines.

*Sarah: As soon as I get home, that baby [the computer] will be clipped on, you know...I--*Laughter* and after supper those dishes are, the old dishwasher's running. Mike can watch his ESPN and I can go play on my computer. I love it. There's so much great stuff out there. I think an e-mail might be-- I don't know. A daily, weekly? Um, I think a meeting-- So many of us work, um, have so many commitments, that it's hard to go to a meeting. I mean, you think about any of the deals going on at church, schools, any volunteer...it's such a--*

Amelia: I agree.

Sarah: ... You know, but there's, it's just a shrinking time commitment. If there were a website that you knew you could go to that would be based on just what you needed to know. You know, there's one just about cattle, just about soy, just about chickens, um, you know. That might be, you know, that you knew would have an update on what's coming.

[In reference to my question about how information delivery might be improved:] *How about a daily e-mail? From some reliable source that um, [would be an] updated information base. Or a weekly, but it changes everyday. [Right and so you do have e-mail and check that regularly?] Yeah. [Okay. Do others have e-mail that they check?] *Various "Mmmhmm's"* – Sue, MWFG*

Um. I used to read the magazines that came. There're so many magazines that come and they all got good information in there if you could just have time to read it all, but you just don't have time. – Evelyn, MWFG

I don't care to read the magazines. I don't have time. I don't want to mess with any of that. – Amelia, MWFG

Government agency personnel seem to recognize many of the above challenges for women, as well as the different information acquisition and decision-making obstacles depending on a woman's stage in life.

I would venture to say, though, that if there were constraints, most of 'em would be self-imposed. And what I mean by this is, I think, I'd just say that it's-- We all have limitations on what we can do,

and I think that one of those, everybody's most limiting factor is time. And I'm going to venture to say that for mo--, for many...many female landowners, time is so limiting that they don't have the time to be as involved in some of those decision as maybe they'd even like to be. – Bob (supervisor), AFG

*Adam: Well, I was just thinking *Clears Throat* thinking back, like to my, say, my grandparents, my grandmothers, compared to my daughters. The world we live in today is so much, I mean-- I feel like my daughters are well informed, self-confident, where, uh, maybe, years ago, my grandmothers didn't have that opportunity, and they lived in a world that just was, you know, baffling to 'em. Or, maybe it was the husbands they had, you know, but... No, I think our-- I think most of the women landowners that we deal with are well informed. And if they don't know they'll ask you.*

Bob: It's a good point though, Adam. I mean, that's a good point about the changing generations.

Adam: Yup.

Bob: It really it is because a lot of the land would be owned by the older generation. And the way they looked at things was probably different than the younger generation that's coming up. So, good point.

Steve: That's basically what I was going to say is the traditional roles. Back then the man, husband did all the work on the farm, she helped out when-- But she did all the cooking and for the hired help. She didn't know, really know what was going on. A lot of time I do talk to the older people that were in those situations. It's always, "You got to ask so and so." I mean, they kind of know, but yet they're not going to make a decision today. If, if it's a real young family, they usually have two, three, four kids that the wife is working with, so that's taking up most of her time, but you can tell at night when the k--, they're alone she's getting caught up and she's being more informed as far as what the operations are. And then when the kids get older and go to school she's very, she's more active within the farming operation.

Adam: Not only, to add something to Steve there, I mean, not only is she, uh, she's raising three or four kids, and running a household, she's probably working full time off the farm, nowadays. Or, you know, that didn't happen years ago. – AFG

Though agency personnel did identify (as is illustrated in the above comments) unique barriers for women's full engagement with their land, all agency participants, at the same time, stressed that differences in information transfer between men and women did not exist. Respondents focused on individual differences, rather than gender differences. Frequently agency participants would shift the

dialogue away from women's situations, in particular, to people in general. Ironically, agency participants used highly gender-specific language, nearly always referring to "parents" as "Dad."

[So, my next question is, if you could describe what outreach efforts that you have for women landowners, if any?]

Janet: *Well, so far this Cass County women landowner survey is the only thing that we've really done since I've been here. I don't know if before that if we did anything special for just women. But, um, I know there are other field offices in the area that have done stuff, but in Cass County this has been our only project so far. [Okay. This can also include informal outreach efforts. I don't know if you've had any of those.]*

Adam: ** [Naming a specific program]

Janet: *Yeah, we had the ** program. It's geared more towards the urban side of the population. But it's a great way to get our name out. No one knew what ** was and what the ** was and that's been a great source to get out to people, so...*

Bob: *The other that I'd say from their perspective, and maybe it'll make them think about some things too and then I can add some stuff that I've seen in a lot of other offices, but we do a whole lot of outreach to a lot of people.*

Bob: *But a lot of times we haven't made it focus to just female landowners or anyone else. I mean, we've got district mailings that go all the time.*

Janet: *Right.*

Bob: *And newsletters and things like that. So, those outreach efforts go to all people, not just, you know, male landowners, they go to female landowners as well. But, probably, I think what they were trying to say is that stuff that was just targeted that way.*

Janet: *Yeah, we have an annual report that goes out in the newspaper to everyone. We do radio programs. That would be, we use that as an outreach. News articles in the paper. – AFG*

Bob: *You know, and that question that we were talking about earlier about what the typical female landowner might look like that we would deal with and then, and how much involvement is, I would be--, it would be incredibly hard for me to answer that question. 'Cause I don't think there is any such things as typical. I mean, I can remember in the days back when I was in positions like these and even today, today when I'm dealing with landowners who are maybe not happy with me, or us. Many times, even if it's land that's owned in joint ownership between a husband and wife, then that wife knows exactly what's going on in that farm.*

Adam: *Right.*

Bob: *And I've seen many situations when I walked in and sat down at the kitchen table to sell something and he looked at her and she said, "No," and it was done.*

Adam: *Yeah. That's right. *Over Talking* [You've all experienced that too?] *Over Talking**

Janet: *That ** [project] we just did the--*

Adam: *Right. The one we just got the, uh--*

Janet: *Yes, yes.*

Adam: *I was setting up the same deal at the kitchen table and I was talking to the landowner trying to get him to sign the ** and I, I had the feeling that he wanted it. And his wife spoke up and says, "You know, I'm the hold up here." And then I asked her why, you know, we talked it all over and then about a year or so later, why, she signed it. *Chuckle* I don't know.*

Bob: *So, it would be hard to say that they weren't involved. And then you could go into the situation where it's a, a widow or she is the sole owner of the land and I think it's hard to say. Some probably not very involved and some are very involved and it would be the same for the men. I don't know if I can say that there's a pattern.*

Adam: *No.*

Janet: *No.*

Bob: *You know? And maybe research that's been done, maybe you guys will be able to compare your survey results to a other survey with just men or with a diverse group and see differences in that and see how people get that information and then that'll tell you something but, to me it would be a diverse group.*

Adam: *Oh, yes. We've got 'em everywhere. -AFG*

[In reference to my question of whether or not there are constraints for women landowners being involved with their land:] **Pause* It's a tough one. I mean, *Long pause* Again, it's hard to answer. You--, I--, I don't think any answer you give here would be across the board but, yeah, yeah I suppose at times there're probably for-- the right person, there could be constraints. - Bob (supervisor), AFG*

Bob: *But again, I don't think you can draw a conclusion and say there's a difference between men or women. There's probably, there's differences between individuals, yes. But you could have a male landowner and a female that are both very committed to their land and want to see it used the best way, and you could have a male landowner and a female landowner that could care less. So, I don't--*

I couldn't say that I see a gender thing. I think it's more about how they were brought up with the land, how much, what their parents thought of the land and in things like that. The one thing I think you could probably say, at least we've talked about this in the past as an agency, is the further away the connection to the land, the less or the l--, you know. If they haven't been on the land since they were this tall, there's maybe a greater chance they have less connection to it than somebody who left or even still lives there, you know, left later, or still lives there...I mean, I think people who watched Dad work very, very hard taking care of the land would be very upset if they knew their land wasn't being taken care of well. And other folks if it was just an investment for Dad and they didn't even hardly know that Dad owned the land and he just, and when he passed away they got the land, you know, it's nothing more, they just look at it as the check comes in the mail. And probably the reason that they'd get upset is that the check didn't come in the mail.

Adam: *Mhmm.*

Janet: *I'd have to agree.*

D: *I would too.*

Adam: *And the other side of that is, Dad mold board plowed everything and nowadays they're not doing that, so they--, you know, they've seen the value of, say, no-till farming, or minimum till and the um...you know, I think we've made some real--*

Bob: *Positive strides*

Adam: *Positive strides, and uh--*

Pause

Steve: *Yeah, I'd have to agree with Bob. If they're out there living on the land and they learned from their parents, their dad out there, 'cause they're very proud of that, that their dad took care of that. You can just tell the way, by listening to 'em, that they want to continue that, that they want to see the wildlife there, they want to see these other conservation practices. Save the, save the wildlife, and the different plants and everything. But, I don't see it any which way as far as gender, I think it's on a individual basis. – AFG*

There are definitely differences, but I wouldn't say that there's a gender difference, again. I mean, not the one that you could define. It's based on the person, again, you know. – Bob (supervisor), AFG

I'm very anxious to get the information from this research. I think I said that in my e-mail. Because our job is all about working with landowners and this is a growing part of the landowner base and

we need to figure out how we best outreach to them. And I'm guessing that answers that we learn from this research won't apply just to women. It'll apply to men as well, and so I think we might learn some things of how we can do things better. We're excited. – Bob (supervisor), AFG

Agency participants could easily cite situations in which women had a great deal of control with information collection and decision-making, yet when pressed, had trouble citing examples of males controlling information flow. In light of the responses of the women landowners to how information is exchanged and decisions made, I assume that agency participants were highlighting women's power and downplaying any potential male domination.

[When there are discussions when you work with both a husband and a wife as landowners....how do those discussions turn out when there's a disagreement?]

Adam: *You know how they turn out.* *Long Laughter*

Steve: *Coming from the man!* *Laughter* *We always lose!* *Laughter*

Bob: *I tell you what, my observation would be, *Pause* is that, if she's sitting at the table, and she's that involved in the operation, if she isn't sold, you're toast.*

Adam: *Yup. [Really?]*

Bob: *Yup.*

Janet: *Yup.*

Steve: *More and more today, yup.*

Bob: *I've seen it over and over and over again, you know. If she's that involved in the operation, and she's sitting at the table, and she ain't sold: "thunk." You better start convincing her.*

Steve: *Pretty much that's who you're talking to when you come in, if they come in together. A lot of times, he doesn't bring his wife, or for that reason maybe, I don't know. But, if they come together, a lot of times, you better be talking to her. In some respect, yeah.*

Bob: *And probably the most foolish mistake you could make is that if you walk into the kitchen table and sat down and they were both sitting there and if you only directed your attention at the husband and you never paid any attention to her, you probably just sold--*

Adam: *Besides not getting cookies!* *Laughter*

Bob: *Besides not getting cookies, you're probably going to get a "no" on the whole thing. You better show her the same respect that you show him because they're both owners and, you know, if she doesn't sense that that's there, I think you're probably toast as well.*

[Okay. That makes sense. Do you ever see a situation where the wife is sold on it, but the man is not?]

Bob: Yeah.

Janet: Yeah, I'm sure we have. [You don't have any cases that spring to mind?]

Adam: Oh yeah, I think--

Janet: Well, the whole ** thing, we had the husband sold on that long, long ago and then she didn't want it. Took her about a year and a half to-- [But, what I'm thinking of is if the wife is sold, but the husband isn't.] Oh, the wife is sold.

Adam: Well, they just need to go home and work that out. [Okay. But, do you ever see that happen?] Oh yeah. [You do. Okay. How about others, do you see that happening, that you can think of an actual example?]

Janet: Where the wife is sold, but the husband's not? [Mhmm.]

Bob: I've seen a bunch but I'm trying to think of the exact example.

[No example was given.]

Despite this apparent disconnect with respect to gender dynamics between agency personnel and the experience of the women landowner participants, agency respondents did point out potential problems with landlord/tenant relations that female participants did not readily acknowledge. In particular, female landlords all placed a great deal of trust in their tenants, yet, renters and landowners do not always share the same interests in the land. Moreover, agency respondents addressed landlord's vulnerability in their relationships with their tenants.

Adam: I know some renter though, who are pretty close to bullying their landlords.

Bob: Yes.

Adam: In this situation of--

Bob: I agree.

Adam: With ** because that is the very best land on the farm...and we're putting that into a ** [a set-aside]. And he wants to keep that land. And he'll try and talk his landlord out of it.

Bob: Uh-huh.

Adam: Everyone's usually paying uh...oh, I'd say, at least a 50 dollar premium for that land over what the cash rent would be, but yet, the tenant doesn't want to pay that. But, uh, so, I always say, well, you know if they want to pay a hundred and fifty nine dollars an acre, why --

Adam: Let 'em pay it and continue farming.

Phil: *Yeah. You know, they got the same option...Well, uh, just in the case of, just in this particular case where the tenant doesn't want to give up the land. And so we're trying to put a practice on the land that is going to enhance the **... And, uh, this person is trying to talk the landlord out of doing that just simply 'cause, for his own greed. I mean, that's what he wants the best land for, and they do talk hard sometimes and they get it done. They talk their landlord out of putting those ** in.*

Janet: *They'll tell 'em stuff, like, you know, if you don't, you know, you'll never find anyone else to rent this if you put these in. And what are you going to do and--*

Phil: *Yes.*

Adam: *Well, a lot of times--*

Janet: *"I could come and--, I'm not going to farm it, and you're not going to find anybody else who'll--," and they believe 'em. Instead of--, but now is it changing, lately.*

Phil: *And it's not women, just women landowners. It's the men.*

Bob: *Yeah*

Phil: *I can think, right now I can't think of no women landowners that have been bullied like this; it's the men. The male landowners. Right.*

Adam: *Normally, they're older land owners. [Note that census data indicates that women landowners tend to be older than male landowners.]*

Phil: *Mhmm. [Mhmm.]*

Adam: *They probably haven't kept up, you know, as far as the rules and regulations. They've let the tenant do it and so they relied on him to the point that he thinks, "Hey. I've got 'em over barrel now." – AFG*

Janet: *Well, I have a few with **, and the landowners just decide it's not worth fighting with the renter on and they just let it go. The landlord really wants it, the tenant doesn't want to give up the land to retire it. So the landowner just says, "Forget it, maybe next year." [Okay. Has that been all of your experiences too?]*

Adam: *Mhmm. Yeah. – AFG*

Conclusion

Summary

Women farmland owner study participants were generally interested in and at least somewhat involved with the land that they owned. Personal relationships were most important for women participants for information transfer and decision-making. Spouses, tenants, children, friends and professionals who they knew personally were the most significant and most trusted sources of information. Women participants had much less confidence in information provided by strangers and impersonal or secondary sources. Bankers, lawyers and environmental groups are data sources about which female participants expressed outright distrust.

Despite women's desire to be involved with their land, ubiquitous subtle and overt gender bias continued to shape the manner in which women acquired and used information. In certain cases, women participants conveyed stories of blatant gender discrimination. Yet, the more unassuming day by day bias was perhaps a greater barrier to women's participation with information collection and decision-making. This sexism took the form of double-standards and criticism of decisions and behavior and negated judgments, in addition to the women's internal censorship and deprecation.

Beyond apparent discrimination, convoluted government programs, limited time and social isolation are other obstacles that women participants encountered with being more actively engaged with their farmland. The amount of free time available to acquire information was the most essential variable to consider for information flow to women landowners. The best means for improving information transfer for participants seemed to depend most on their current life situation (whether or not they had an outside job, are currently married and/or have children in the home). As such, widowed and divorced women without the intensity of immediate family and work responsibilities preferred small group meetings as a means for improving data flow. Married women, often with jobs and children, outright rejected meetings as a helpful option. These women favored regular emails, websites, flyers and the Dataline. None of the women were particularly enthusiastic about more conventional outreach tools, namely newsletters and radio programs.

Government agency personnel recognized many of the experiences that women landowners faced when accessing information about their land, including the significance of personal relationships, time limitations, the confusing nature of government programs and generational differences with

information transfer. Personnel also identified potentially problematic and exploitive relationships between landlords and tenants that women landlords did not readily appreciate. Though landlords greatly trusted their tenants, renters and landowners do not always share the same interests with decisions about the land; decisions that are best for tenants are not always advantageous to the landlord. Agency personnel acknowledged landlords' vulnerability in these situations. Though, agency respondents were hesitant to involve themselves in relationships between tenants and landlords.

Regrettably, agency respondents did not recognize either the discreet or explicit gender bias with which women must grapple, carefully repudiating gender as an influential variable. Personnel believed that though gender bias may have been a problem with previous generations, they believe the obstacle no longer exists. A necessary first step for improving outreach to women farmland owners will be for government agency staff to acknowledge gender as an influential feature of information flow.

Implications for Sustainable Agriculture

As owners of at least half of all agricultural land in Iowa, and the largest group of farm landlords, women's relationships to the land have an enormous influence on agricultural sustainability. This influence will continue to expand as demographic shifts find women taking legal control of increasing amounts of farmland (Keller 2001). Thus, empowering women with appropriate information and decision-making capabilities is essential for the future viability of agriculture.

A growing corpus of literature suggests that, as a group, women are more concerned than men about environmental issues (Boddy Media 2001, Chiappe and Flora 1998, Hartman Group 1997, Hartman Group 1996, Plumwood 1994, Shiva 1994, Cihangir 1994, Warren 1994). Tapping into these concerns to encourage production and marketing shifts has the potential to greatly expand sustainable farming practices. Yet, women landowners do not always have the social and cultural power to translate this heightened awareness into action. Therefore, addressing patriarchal power structures that limit women's conscious and unconscious options is imperative to fully address the issues at hand (Gaard 1993).

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Study

Though this study provides a great deal of information on women's information sources and needs, comparing this data with men's responses would have offered a broader picture. I chose to focus exclusively on women, however, at the behest of the Cass County Women Landowners Advisory Committee. This committee felt that the researchers' needs would be best directed to women only.¹⁰ As a participatory project, the researchers felt compelled to follow their lead. Nevertheless, I do not believe that the lack of comparative data diminishes the utility of this study for outreach efforts directed more specifically to women landowners.

Data gathered at the focus group with agency personnel could have been more effective had more than one agency been represented, the gender composition of the group been more even and/or the supervisor not been present. Though I had invited representatives from five agencies, several of whom were women, schedules were difficult to coordinate and a number of people cancelled the day of the group. I believe that the supervisor present at this session skewed responses toward opinions that other participants believed would be favorable to him. In addition, the existence of only one woman in the group, who also had less seniority than the male participants, made for an uneven power dynamic. Regardless, however, this group brought valuable insight into the mindset of government personnel in at least one government agency, the importance of supervisors for setting the tone for an agency and how uneven gender distribution can allow certain conversations and disallow others.

Breaking down broad marital-status research categories into finer units is a potentially fruitful area for future study. This study's results pointed to different information sources and needs for women depending on their stage in life, most broadly grouped by marital status. Studying further gradations within these broad groups would provide insight into more precise influential variables, for example, presence or absence of young children in the home, on-farm or off-farm employment, gender composition of grown children and close relatives and urban or rural background for the women landowners.

¹⁰ "Researchers" is plural in this section because this particular study was but one piece in a larger project studying needs and outreach options for women farmland owners. Contact Dr. Betty Wells, Iowa State University, for more information on other research components.

Moreover, a study comparing absentee women landlords with those living within the communities where they own there land would be useful for developing programming for women landlords. Finally, expanding this study to other areas across Iowa and the rest of the United States would provide a deeper understanding of the scope of women's information sources and needs and inform the design of future outreach programs.

Appendix A: Landowner Focus Group Questions

1. Could you please introduce yourself and tell us a little about your land?
2. What role do you play in decision-making about your land?
3. Could you tell me about the your sources of information you use to make decisions about your land?
4. Of those you mentioned, what are your best and most trusted information sources? Why? And also, can you also tell us about your least trusted sources of information?
5. Are there better ways for you to receive information about your land than the way you get it now? (i.e. information distribution or hands-on assistance) If so, what are they?
6. Widowed women's question*/Married women's question**
7. If you could do anything you wanted to do with your land, what would you ideally like to see happen in the future (in terms of management, ownership, etc.)? Feel free to dream.
8. If you own more than one tract of land, do you feel differently about those tracts? Why or why not?
9. Is there anything else you'd like to mention that hasn't been brought up already?

.....

***For married/partnered women:**

Please explain any differences between the goals you and your husband/partner have for your land.

****For widowed women:**

How involved were you with the management of the farm before your husband's death?

Appendix B: Agency Personnel Focus Group Questions

1. Please describe your outreach efforts to women landowners
2. Could you tell me about your clients?
3. In general, what is your perception of the involvement of women landowners in decision-making about their land? (including absentee owners)
4. In your assessment, are there any constraints/barriers to women landowners becoming more involved with decision-making? If so, what are they? If not, why?
5. What do you think are the most important topics for women landowners to know about? Why?
6. With respect to the future of their land, describe any differences you notice between men and women in terms of their goals for their land?

Appendix C: Landowner Background Questions

So that I can better place your answers to the questions at this meeting in context, could you please fill out this form? I do not need your name on it, so it will be kept anonymous. Thank you!

What is your regular occupation?

What best describes your present employment status?

- a. Unemployed
- b. Retired
- c. Disabled
- d. Temporary or part-time
- e. Employed full-time
- f. Homemaker
- g. Student
- h. Other? _____

Have you ever or do you now live on a farm? If yes, did you grow up on a farm?

Do you now consider yourself a farmer?

What is your marital status?

- a. Now married
- b. Widowed
- c. Divorced
- d. Separated
- e. Never married
- f. Living together

Year of birth _____

Number of years of education _____

Appendix D: Agency Personnel Background Questions

So that I can better place your answers to the questions at this meeting in context, could you please fill out this form? I do not need your name on it, so it will be kept anonymous. Thank you!

What agency/organization do you work for?

What is your job title?

How many years have you been in this position?

Please list any relevant prior positions:

References

- Bell, Michael M., Michael S. Carolan, Diane Mayerfeld, Rick Exner. *Professional Development for the Adoption of Sustainable Agriculture on Rented Land: Final Research Report*. Ames: Department of Sociology, November 2001.
- Boddy Media. *Conservation Communication Survey: Report of Key Findings*. Des Moines: Boddy Media, August 2001.
- Bres, Rose Falls. *Maids, Wives and Widows: The Law of the Land and of the Various States as it Affects Women*. New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1918.
- Buckingham-Hatfield, Susan. *Gender and Environment*. New York: Routledge, 2000).
- Cass County Women Farmland Owners Advisory Committee. Personal Communication. May 2002.
- Catterall, M. and P. Maclaran. "Focus Group Data and Qualitative Analysis Programs: Coding the Moving Picture as Well as the Snapshots." *Sociological Research Online* 2:1, 1997.
<<http://www.socreasonline.org.uk/socresonline/2/1/6.html>> (July 12, 2003).
- Chawla, Monica. "Women in Colonial America." *University of Arizona Women's Studies Department*. 1997. <<http://www.infocenter.ccit.arizona.edu/~ws/ws200/fall97/grp11/part5.htm>> (January 10, 2003).
- Chiappe, Marta B. and Cornelia Butler Flora. "Gendered Elements of the Alternative Agriculture Paradigm." *Rural Sociology* 63:3 (1998): 372-393.
- Cihangir, Arzu. "The Relationship Between Environmental Attitudes and Reported Behaviors." M.S. thesis, Ankara: Middle East Technical University, 1994.
<http://www.metu.edu.tr/home/wwwbe/thabs/1994/psy_abs_94.html> (January 12, 2003).
- Clapper, Danial Amy. and Anne P. Massey. "Electronic Focus Groups: A Framework for Exploration." *Information and Management* 30:1 (January 1996): 43-50.
- Debrecey, Roger, Martin Putterill, Lai-Lai Tung and A. Lee Gilbert. "New Tools for the Determination of E-Commerce Inhibitors." *Decision Support Systems* 34:2 (January 2003): 177-195.
- Easton, George, Annette Easton and Michael Belch. "An Experimental Investigation of Electronic Focus Groups." *Information and Management*. In Press, Corrected Proof. (28 March 2003).
- Effland, Anne B., Denise M. Rogers and Valerie Grim. "Women as Agricultural Landlords: What do We Know About Them?" *Agriculture History* 67:2 (1993): 235-261.
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Gender and Development Service. Sustainable Development Department. A Gender Perspective on Land Rights: Equal Footing. TC/I/73495E/1/06.02/2000.
- Fuson, Ken and Tom Suk. "Field of Battle." *The Des Moines Register*. January 26, 2003, A, 10A.

Gaard, Greta. "Living Interconnections with Animals and Nature." In *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, edited by Greta Gaard. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993.

Geisler, Charles C., William F. Waters, and Katrina Amy. Eadie. "The Changing Structure of Female Agricultural Land Ownership, 1946 and 1978." *Rural Sociology* 50:1 (1985), 74-87.

Gilbert, Jess and Thomas M. Beckley. "Ownership and Control of Farmland: Landlord-Tenant Relations in Wisconsin." *Rural Sociology* 58:4 (1993): 569-579.

Guirdham, Maureen. *Communicating Across Cultures*. West Lafayette: Ichor Business Books, 1999.

Haney, Wava G. and Jane B. Knowles, editors. *Women and Farming: Changing Roles, Changing Structures*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1988.

Hartman Group. *Food and the Environment: A Consumer's Perspective – Phase I*. Summer 1996.

Hartman Group. *Food and the Environment: A Consumer's Perspective – Phase II*. Winter 1997.

History Channel Online. "History of Women's Suffrage in America." *Exhibits*.
<www.historychannel.com/exhibits/woman/herstory.html> (17 October 2003).

History of Cass County, Iowa. Springfield: Continental Historical Company, 1884.

Horwitz, Elinor Lander. *On the Land: American Agriculture from Past to Present*. New York: Atheneum, 1980.

Howell, Richard W. and Harold J. Vetter. *Language in Behavior*. New York: Human Sciences Press, 1985.

Jensen, Joan M. *Promise to the Land: Essays on Rural Women*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991.

Keller, Des. "Who Really Owns The Farms: Grandmother's Have Become Today's Land Barons." *Progressive Farmer*, Oct. 2001, 20-21.

Kocks, Dorothee. *Dream a Little: Land and Social Justice in Modern America*. Berkley: University of California Press, 2000.

Lemke, J. Amy. "Analysing Verbal Data: Principles, Methods, and Problems." 1998.
<<http://www.academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/education/jlemke/papers.handbook.htm>> (20 October 2003).

Opie, John. *The Law of the Land: Two Hundred Years of American Farmland Policy*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987.

Parent, Michael, R., Brent Gallupe, Wm. David Salisbury and Jay M. Handelman. "Knowledge Creation in Focus Groups: Can Group Technologies Help?" *Information and Management* 38:1 (October 2000): 47-58.

Perkins, Jerry. "Like Fathers, Like Daughter." *The Des Moines Register*, 26 May 2002. 1M.

Peter, Gregory, Michael Mayerfeld Bell, Susan Jarnagin and Donna Bauer. "Coming Back Across the Fence: Masculinity and the Transition to Sustainable Agriculture." *Rural Sociology* 65:2 (2000): 215-233.

Pieper, Charles A. and Neil E. Harl. *Iowa Farmland Ownership & Tenure 1982-1997: A Fifteen Year Perspective*. Ames: Iowa State University, January 2000.

Plumwood, Val. "Nature, Self and Gender: Feminism, Environmental Philosophy, and the Critique of Rationalism." In *The Environmental Ethics and Policy Book: Philosophy, Ecology, Economics*, edited by Donald VanDeVeer and Christine Pierce. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1994.

Research Librarian, Iowa State University Library. Personal Communication. April 2003.

Rogers, Denise and Ann M. Vandeman. "Women as Farm Landlords: Does Gender Affect Environmental Decision-Making on Leased Land?" *Rural Sociology* 58:4 (1993): 560-568.

Rogers, Denise and Gene Wunderlich. Economic Resources and Technology Division. Economic Research Service. United States Department of Agriculture. Acquiring Farmland in the United States. Agriculture Information Bulletin No. 637.

Rogers, Denise. Economic Research Service, Resource and Technology Division. Agricultural Economics and Land Ownership Survey. United States Department of Agriculture. Leasing Farmland in the United States. AGES-9159.

Rogers, Susan Carol, and Sonya Salamon. "Inheritance and Social Organization Among Family Farmers. *American Ethnologist* 10:3 (1983): 529-550.

Rogers, Susan Carol. "Female Forms of Power and the Myth of Male Dominance: A Model of Female/Male Interaction in Peasant Society." *American Ethnologist* (1975): 727-756.

Ross, Earl D, editor. *A Century of Farming in Iowa: 1846-1946*. Ames: The Iowa State College Press, 1946.

Salamon, Sonya and Ann Mackey Keim. "Land Ownership and Women's Power in a Midwestern Farming Community." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 58:4 (1979): 109 – 119.

Salamon, Sonya. "Culture and Agricultural Land Tenure." *Rural Sociology* 58:4 (1993): 580-598.

Sawer, Barbara J. "Predictors of the Farm Wife's Involvement in General Management and Adoption Decisions." *Rural Sociology* 38:4 (1973): 412-426.

Schlebecker, John T. *Whereby We Thrive: A History of American Farming, 1607-1972*. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1975.

Shiva, Vandana. "Development, Ecology and Women." In *The Environmental Ethics and Policy Book: Philosophy, Ecology, Economics*, edited by Donald VanDeVeer and Christine Pierce. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1994.

Shortall, Sally. *Women and Farming: Property and Power*. New York: Macmillan Press, Ltd, 1999.

Smith, Page. *Daughters of the Promised Land*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1970.

Social Sciences Institute. Natural Resource Conservation Service. National Science and Technology Consortium. United States Department of Agriculture. *Women in Agriculture: Changing Roles and Current Outreach Techniques*, Technical Note 3.2, 1998. August 1998.

Trager, George Amy. "Paralanguage: A First Approximation." In *Language and Culture in Society*, edited by D. Hymes. New York: Harper and Row, 1964.

Warren, D.M. Personal Communication. March 1997.

Warren, Emily J. "The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism." In *The Environmental Ethics and Policy Book: Philosophy, Ecology, Economics*, edited by Donald VanDeVeer and Christine Pierce. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1994.

Wells, Betty. "Community and Environment: Strengthening Women's Choices." *WFAN Newsletter*, March 2002, 1 and 7.

Wells, Betty. Personal Communication. November 2002.

Wunderlich, Gene. Economic Resources and Technology Division. Economic Research Service. United States Department of Agriculture. *Owning Farmland in the United States*, Agriculture Information Bulletin No. 682.

Zinn, Howard. *A People's History of the United States: 1492 to Present*. New York: Perennial Classics, 1999.

Zobrist, Edith Lucille Blood. *Ten of Us Growing Up on an Iowa Farm: 1917-1935*. Ames: Heuss Printing, 1995.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I want to thank the women farmland owners of Cass County who made time out of their busy schedules to come to my focus group meetings and sit through interviews, generously sharing their experiences as landowners with me. I can only hope that this thesis will, in some small way, contribute to making information more accessible and relevant to you.

To say “thank you” to Dr. Ricardo Salvador, my major professor, hardly seems sufficient. He unequivocally supported me throughout the trials and tribulations of completing this degree. His honesty, patience and good judgment will always be an inspiration to me.

Dr. Jill Wagner, committee member for my minor in anthropology, has also been invaluable. She brought worthwhile insights into the thesis itself, but perhaps more importantly, into the process of surviving graduate school. I sincerely appreciate the help she has given me.

Another committee member, Dr. Deborah Muenchrath, provided me with initial thesis topic inspiration. She made the process of identifying research topics much less intimidating.

Finally, I need to express gratitude to Erin Tegtmeier for all of her kindness and support. She was always there to empathize with me and lend an ear to my frustration, yet gently remind me that I need to continue working. Her editorial assistance also made this thesis a much better product than if I'd bumbled through it alone. Thank you. 1